

INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP:
MODELING BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP IN TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project studies the impact of Biblical discipleship in transforming a congregation. Many churches are struggling and are seeking revitalization. The key to congregational transformation is not a program, but Biblical discipleship. Jesus started a church by investing his time, energy, and knowledge into others. The Apostle's carried on their discipleship by discipling others. This is what discipleship looks like. By modeling what Christ centered discipleship, American Christianity should begin to experience revitalization in mission, worship, and evangelism. To that end, this project will focus on creating an intentional and relational discipleship model with the goal of multiplication.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The landscape of the American church is shifting and it has been for some time. While many may be just taking notice, church participation in America has been declining since the 1960's. Recently, it has become evidently clear that the institutions of the church no longer have the influence and prestige in American society they once did. While the decline has appeared to move more rapidly over the last decade, the issues driving it started more than a half century ago. The culture is shifting more and more away from the moral code of Judeo-Christian values. This is causing many Christians to question what the future may be for the institutions they love.

The State of the American Church

In 1950 the U.S. population totaled just over 150 million people.¹ Today that number is more than double with a little over 320 million people. Looking back at the last decade Americans have seen an increased population of almost 23 million in the United States, according to estimates by the US Census Bureau.² Yet, since the 1960's the church has declined in attendance, membership, and participation. Looking at population growth and assuming that the church was just able to retain its members, the number of people attending church should have at the very least doubled since 1950. That is without accounting for conversion and evangelistic growth.

The Pew Research Center reports the trends of Americans and their participation with church in percentages. Just polling the last decade, there has been an overall decline

¹ "1950 Fast Facts," United States Census Bureau, December 7, 2013, https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1950_fast_facts.html, (accessed June 11, 2014).

² "United States Census Bureau." United States Department of Commerce. December 7, 2013. <https://www.census.gov/> (accessed June 10, 2014).

in reported regular church attendance (more than 2 times a month) of 2%. The numbers have gone from 39% of Americans in 2003 to 37% in 2013.³ The same research found that almost 30% of Americans seldom or never attend church, up 5% over the last decade.⁴ Probably the most alarming statistic revealed by Pew is that 33% of Americans under the age of 30 do not identify or affiliate with a church, compared to about 20% of the generation before them.⁵ Alvin Reid writes in 2002 in his book *Radically Unchurched* that, "Over the past decade membership in Protestant churches has dropped 9.5%, while the population grew 11%."⁶ As the population continues to grow, those attending worship continues to decline. Simple math shows that the church has been in decline for more than a generation.

Another Pew Research poll completed in 2014 reveals some other somber statistics. There has been a sharp decline in church participation and affiliation over the last seven years. The religiously unaffiliated grew by 6% over that time period. While the mainline protestant church, once a staple of American Christianity, shrunk by almost 4%. Mainline Protestantism currently holds less than 15% of the total population. For the first time in modern religious American history the unaffiliated outnumber people attending mainline churches.⁷

³ Michael Lipka, "What Surveys Say about Worship Attendance – and Why Some Stay Home." Pew Research Center, September 13, 2013, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/13/what-surveys-say-about-worship-attendance-and-why-some-stay-home/> (accessed June 11, 2014).

⁴ Lipka, "What Surveys Say about Worship Attendance – and Why Some Stay Home."

⁵ "Growth of the Nonreligious." Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project, July 2, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/07/02/growth-of-the-nonreligious-many-say-trend-is-bad-for-american-society/> (accessed June 11, 2014).

⁶ Alvin L. Reid, *Radically Unchurched: Who They are and How to Reach Them*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 23.

⁷ "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/> (accessed June 15, 2015).

The landscape of Christianity looks bleak in America, but it is even worse for the mainline churches. According to Barna Group research, since 1950, the number of mainline churches in the United States (Presbyterian Church USA, Methodist, American Baptists, Lutheran, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ) has declined by 8,000 total churches.⁸ In the past decade there has been a 22% drop in mainline church attendance among adults who have children under the age of 18. My denomination, The Presbyterian Church (USA), has not seen a net year of growth in membership since 1969 in the Presbyterian Church US and 1965 in the United Presbyterian Church USA who merged in 1983 to become the Presbyterian Church USA. These two denominations combined for a total membership of 4.5 million members in 1965, 3.1 million members upon the merger in 1983, and today have less than 1.6 million members.⁹ On top that, 60% of Presbyterians who grow up in the church are likely to leave the church as an adult either for another faith or no faith at all.¹⁰

Not every church in America is experiencing decline. There are churches that continue to grow, and many of them at rapid rates. The problem is that many of these churches are experiencing their growth through transfer growth. The Southern Baptist convention recently reported that eight of every nine people who are baptized have a previous connection with another church or denomination.¹¹ While the church is losing members at about a 10% rate, according to Reid, it is converting members at a less than

⁸ "Report Examines the State of Mainline Protestant Churches," Barna Group, December 7, 2009, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/leadership/323-report-examines-the-state-of-mainline-protestant-churches#.Vt3G2JwrKUk> (accessed June 11, 2014).

⁹ "Office of the General Assembly," PC(USA) OGA, <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/churchwide-ministries/stats/> (accessed June 11, 2014).

¹⁰ "'Nones' on the Rise," Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project, October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> (accessed June 10, 2014).

¹¹ Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 23.

1% rate.¹² There is no possible way to maintain the church, let alone grow the church, if these trends continue.

Marc Solas, a blogger and youth ministry professional, claims that many churches are losing youth members after they graduate from high school at about a 70% rate, with far less than half of those returning to Christianity after college.¹³ Kara Powell, author of *Sticky Faith*, has a little lower number in her book; “As we have examined other research, our conclusion is that 40 to 50 percent of kids who graduate from a church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college.”¹⁴ Even by using the lower estimate from Kara Powell at 40 to 50%, it is still very concerning for the church and its future.

This may be cause for some people to panic and to wonder whether or not the death of Christianity in America is imminent. However, this is probably a bit extreme at the moment. If these trends continue downward that may change. In some respects, the church is not dying, far from it. When looking at the numbers coming out of the evangelical church in the United States there seems to be another story. Evangelical Christianity has remained almost unchanged in terms of numbers and percentages over the last seven years with a less than 1% decline in terms of population share.

Interestingly, the number of people who identify as evangelical actually rose by more than two million, most likely due to population and conversion growth.¹⁵ While the overall Christian population share has declined by almost 8%, more than 70% of

¹² Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 23.

¹³ Marc Solas. "Top 10 Reasons Our Kids Leave Church," January 7, 2014, <http://www.churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-articles/166129-marc-solas-10-surprising-reasons-our-kids-leave-church.html> (accessed June 14, 2014).

¹⁴ Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 96-97, Kindle.

¹⁵ "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project.

Americans still identify as Christian.¹⁶ It is not all gloom and doom for Christianity in America. While the numbers are anything but encouraging, this is not the end of religion in the western world as some might claim, but that does not mean that the trends or declining numbers should be ignored.

While many Christian parents and church leaders feel a conviction to pass down the faith to next generation, the statistics say that it is not happening, at least not at a high rate of success. There are so many factors that add to the decline in the church among youth and young adults and at this point it is difficult to identify exactly how to solve all of the problems. However, if anything, the statistics indicate that the problems are not just going to go away without serious steps being taken to change the direction of the practice of faith in America. People are not just going to decide to come back to church without a reason. Changes should be considered to a church's approach to ministry and mission, especially how it relates to converting people to Christ and discipling the next generation of Christians, if the trajectory is to be altered.

The American church, in the broadest sense, is facing challenges that go well beyond just attendance. Spirituality is still be big part of American culture, however it is no longer translating into church participation like it once did. There are some who believe that the next generation is actually very spiritual, they just are not interested in the institutions of American churches. Michael Frost writes,

A recent survey of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 found that 18 percent of them say they attend worship nearly every week or more often. Compare that to the fact that 40 percent say religion is very important in their lives, 41 percent report praying daily, and 53

¹⁶ "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project.

percent say they are certain of the existence of God. In other words, religious faith is way more popular than church attendance.¹⁷

There have been countless studies, blogs, and books written about these alarming statistics. Many people within the walls of the church have recognized the trends and are trying to reverse them. However, the numbers only tell part of the story. While the future of American Christianity may seem bleak, I believe these statistics offer hope. Trying to make the church or Christians socially relevant for the last 50 years has not worked. By relevant I mean looking more like the culture than like Christ. Christianity is not designed to be relevant. Disciples are created for impact; they are designed to be faithful. As the cultural power and influence of the American church begins to fade, Christians should rethink ministry, mission, and what it means to be faithful from the margins of society. Disciples should rethink what it means to be transformed. Christians should take a hard look what it means to be disciples of Jesus.

Many Christians have succeeded in the past by creating attractional churches that bring people through the doors. The problem is that this does not mean that disciples of Jesus have been made. By definition attractional churches are driven by consumerism, materialism, moralism, and programs that are thinly veiled in Christianity. The size or worship style of a church does not define what it means to be an attractional church. In referring to attractional churches it is about ministry models and paradigms. Attraction can only take a church so far. Attraction without deep connection will not bear fruit. It creates stale, uninspired ministry, which focuses more on survival than transformation. It may bring people to church to fill the seats and the offering plates, but attraction without

¹⁷ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional, Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 183-187, Kindle.

the next step in becoming a disciple does not lead to long lasting impact or change. David Kinnaman, author of *unChristian*, maintains,

Most people in America, when they are exposed to the Christian faith, are not being transformed. They take one step into the door, and the journey ends. They are not being allowed, encouraged, or equipped to love or to think like Christ. Yet in many ways a focus on spiritual formation fits what a new generation is really seeking. Transformation is a process, a journey, not a one-time decision.¹⁸

Conversion to Christ cannot be understood as a one-time commitment, but a process of discipleship fostered in relationship. Sociologist Rodney Stark contends, “To convert someone, you must be or become their close and trusted friend. Consequently, when someone converts to a new religion, then they usually seek to convert their friends and relatives, and consequently conversion tends to proceed through social networks.”¹⁹ It is through this process of constant conversion that transformation takes place, both for the individual and the community. In an age where people are more connected than ever before, conversion should be happening at a higher rate. Social networks are all around us, both physically and through technology. However, is the church shrinking in our ability and opportunity to build community?

Just because people are more connected than ever before does not necessarily mean that there is more community or lasting relationships being fostered. There is a difference between knowing about someone, being connected to them, and being with someone, living in community together. There are some who suggest that the unintended consequence of social media is that it has actually made us feel more alone than ever

¹⁸ David Kinnaman, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Think s about Christianity... and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 82.

¹⁹ Rodney Stark. *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011), 68-69, Kindle.

before. This should be an opportunity for churches to envision a ministry in which authentic community is being fostered where discipleship can take place.

In attractional churches it is easy to hide behind the veil of growing numbers and think disciples are being made. If worship attendance goes up, budgets are rising, and kids are coming to church, many buy into the myth that the church has been successful in discipling the next generation or the people in the pews. It is not safe to assume that just because people attend church or church activities that they are closer to God or better disciples. They may be connected together, but not living in community. It is actually dangerous to believe that transformation is something that can be measured by statistics or attendance over a brief period of time. Discipleship is a lifelong process that brings about constant transformation and it is fostered in community. Churches should be more concerned about growing disciples than they are about growing budgets or attendance.

Willow Creek Community Church is the prime example of an attractional church that has grown, but later realized success in numbers has not equated to success in discipleship. The church is just outside of Chicago and is one of America's largest congregations. During a recent survey of their members they discovered some disturbing statistics about their congregation. While they had been extremely impactful at the beginning of a person's spiritual journey, they were struggling to hold on to members who claimed to be deeper in their faith. *The Reveal Study* said, "Those who were more mature (the close to Christ and Christ-centered members) were often 'stalled' in their spiritual growth or 'dissatisfied' with what the church was doing to help them grow."²⁰ This group equaled 25% of the church's membership. While Willow Creek's ministries

²⁰ Russ Rainey, "Willow Creek Reveal Study – a Summary," The Christian Coaching Center, <http://www.christiancoachingcenter.org/index.php/russ-rainey/coachingchurch2/> (accessed June 11, 2014).

were important in a person's conversion to Christ, they were struggling to develop a process of lifelong discipleship and transformation.

This observation about Willow Creek is pointing to a larger problem among American churches and how disciples are made, or not made. When the mission of the church is to grow solely by counting how many people are coming through the doors or how much money is being donated, it is hard to focus on the mission of Jesus to make disciples. When missional strategies focus on church growth instead of disciple making ministries the soul of the gospel is lost in the church. Success in the area of conversion does not necessarily equate to disciples who are wholly committed to following Jesus and growing in faith. Discipleship requires more than attraction to the church. It is more than conversion. It is more than being connected to other Christians. Discipleship is about community that fosters relationships with one another and more importantly with Jesus. This does not happen in a vacuum, but through intentional relationships.

The State of One Local Church

I currently serve a mid-sized congregation in Butler, Pennsylvania called Meridian United Presbyterian Church (MUPC). I started there as a solo pastor in the summer of 2010. A statistical analysis of the church revealed that the church had been in a decline for a long time. According to the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Office of the General Assembly from the Session Annual Statistical Report in 2009, Meridian UPC had an average worship attendance of 81 people per week. If you factor out holiday attendance, where it is generally higher, the average worship attendance per week was less than 60 people. Every year, for more almost 3 decades from 1981-2009, Meridian

UPC had reported fewer people in worship, decreased membership, lower annual giving, and diminished Christian education enrollment than the previous year.

In 2008 Meridian UPC completed the Congregational Life Survey which revealed some startling statistics. According to the survey only 10% of church members felt they had grown in their faith from the ministry of the church in the past year. 62% of responders said they had little to no growth and 10% responders said there was no growth at all. Therefore, 72% of the congregation believed the ministry of the church had very little, if any, impact on their faith. Only 46% of people believed their spiritual needs were being met by the church. When asked, “I have a sense of excitement about our congregation’s future,” 13% disagreed and 44% were unsure. Only 21% of the congregation agreed the church had a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission, while 20% of people said they were not aware of any of these things. A total of 59% responded “There are ideas, but no clear vision or direction for the church.” This means that only 10% of the congregation believed that there was a clear sense of vision and direction at Meridian UPC.

Upon my arrival as pastor, I was given this report for review. I was told that it would help me learn about where the church is and what needed to be done. It was clear to me that the church needed vision, leadership, and direction. But more than anything else, the members of the congregation needed to grow in their depth of faith. They needed to be highly committed followers of Jesus. They needed to become disciples. If the ministry of the church was not helping the members to grow in their faith and relationship with Jesus, how could they invite others into a relationship with Jesus and his church? From my perspective the lagging worship attendance, minimal missional

opportunities, and sinking Sunday school attendance were all related to a discipleship problem.

Initially I set out to create new Sunday school opportunities in order to remedy the discipleship issues. In one program in 2011 I challenged the church to read the Bible cover to cover in 90 days. It was a huge success by measurement standards. At the time the church averaged about 100 people in worship and 50 people signed up to participate in *The Bible in 90 Days*. I had hoped that engaging the Bible in such a way would breathe life into the congregation's fledgling Sunday school program. However, at the start of the following year's Christian education program, our Sunday school numbers were unchanged.

Next, I enlisted another program called *The Story* in 2012-13. This was a 31 week study for all ages that took place during the Sunday school hour. A sermon series went along with the classes in worship each week, as well as junior church lessons for children under 10 years old. Our hope was that by committing to an entire year of Sunday school, it would become part of people's rhythms. We had 120 people, of our 150 in average worship attendance, participate throughout the year, with about 100 people in average weekly participation. However, once again when the following year kicked off, our numbers went back to their previous levels.

Today (2017) Meridian UPC has an average worship attendance of over 170 people per week, double what it was in 2007. There have been over 100 new members join the church in the last six years. The church's budget has almost tripled from \$120,000 per year, to over \$320,000 per year. The congregation took a new direction in mission. On top of pledging more than \$32,000 to local and global mission projects per

year, an increase of \$18,000 over the last six years. The people of the church have taken on new community services to reach people with the gospel in hands-on projects, a mission partner in Niger, Africa, and a monthly meal for the homeless and hungry in our community. We have been able to hire an associate pastor for family ministries and we have seen most of our growth the last couple years in young families who are returning to the church and life of faith or coming for the first time. In most respects, the church I serve as pastor has seen amazing transformation.

With all the positives there is a problem. It would be easy to hide behind these higher numbers and claim that Meridian UPC has been successful in transformation and faith development among our members. Unfortunately, while every area of ministry in our church has experienced growth over the last 6 years, our Sunday school participation has dropped. Can a congregation be a dynamic movement of the Spirit without discipleship? We have grown in every measurable category except one. Why does our Sunday school have fewer kids in it today than it did six years ago? Why do we have half the number of adults in Sunday school now than when I started as pastor of the church even though the church has grown?

The assumption was that growth in the church would translate to growth in Christian education. If we could grow our Christian education program, we believed that we would be able to help facilitate deeper discipleship for our members that would translate into other areas of the life of faith such as worship, mission, and evangelism. I am not of the opinion that numbers are the goal or that because our attendance in Sunday school is lower that we have failed to be the church. However, I do believe that numbers tell a story. The story being told to us was that while new people were coming to the church,

some who were converting to Christ, there was a diminishing participation in deepening the mind in the life of faith. Could the church be growing if transformation was not taking place in the way of discipleship? Why was growth in membership and attendance not translating into the traditional Sunday school hour?

Meridian UPC has, as far as I know, operated in a Christian education model that was passive learning. Sunday school hour was just before worship and everyone was expected to participate, even though not everyone did. At Meridian UPC, teachers taught and the students were expected to learn. As the church declined in membership and participation, a few faithful people tried to keep the programs going as best they could. Upon my arrival as pastor there was a stated expectation that I would help rebuild the struggling Christian education program that had once been a staple of the church. Many people at Meridian UPC believed Sunday school was an important element to any successful church. However, those same people were not participating. The congregation had an expectation that discipleship would happen in Sunday school, yet no one was coming.

By modeling the education system of the culture, the congregation thought they could simply pass along knowledge about God that would then translate to disciples of Jesus. The basic understanding of discipleship is flawed. Discipleship and Christian education are not the same thing. The church changed the name of the Christian education committee to the discipleship committee, but the programs and approaches remained the same. Education is simply about the mind. While part of discipleship is about knowledge, it is also about relationships, the heart, and the pursuit of community.

A key element of discipleship, relationships, had been lost at Meridian because the program assumed that knowledge was the primary objective. The goal of modern schools is to pass along information and give knowledge. It is understood that this knowledge will equip people for a better life. Modernity teaches that ignorance is the problem and education is the cure. However, contrary to popular belief, knowledge is not enough. People are taught the dangers of smoking, yet many people still smoke. People know the dangers of unprotected sex, yet everyday someone contracts a sexually transmitted disease or has an unwanted pregnancy. If knowledge was the answer, most of the problems facing American culture would have disappeared by now. Jerry Sittser correctly states, “In most cases it is not information we need but transformation.”²¹ If simple knowledge was the answer, the American church would have figured out these issues a long time ago.

Many churches have adopted a similar model when it comes to education and expect that model to usher in true discipleship. Discipleship, according to many local congregations, happens in Sunday school as knowledge is passed on to children and adults. However, disciples cannot be mass produced. The church is not a discipleship factory and graduating from Sunday school does not automatically make someone a disciple. Knowledge alone does not equal discipleship. This assumption, expressed by members of Meridian UPC, was part of the problem. Despite the fact that most of the people who grew up in the Sunday school model at Meridian were no longer engaged in any congregation or faith life, many still believed this was the best way forward.

²¹ Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Revealed: How God Redeems the Story of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 175, Kindle.

This passive learning model of discipleship will not produce disciples of Jesus. Relationship with the risen Lord must be fostered through relationship with one another. Greg Ogden writes, “Disciple making ensures that the gospel is embedded deeply in the lives of mature believers who serve as links to the future. Discipling then is a relationship where we intentionally walk alongside a growing disciple or disciples in order to encourage, correct, and challenge them in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.”²² There is no shortcut to this disciple making process and it cannot be found in a program. True discipling takes time, patience, and relationship.

The solution to our discipleship problem was not to enhance our Christian education programs or to try and improve upon them. This is a Christendom solution for a post-Christendom church. Engaging the mind is a necessary part of discipleship. However, discipleship goes much further and much deeper. We need to adopt a model based in the Bible that is relational, educational, and life-giving. Discipleship affects the whole of a person, not just the mind. Therefore, the way forward should address the whole of a person.

Thesis

American Christianity and my local congregation have the same problem. They are both lacking in discipleship. A church without discipleship fails to live out the command of Jesus, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, to make disciples. The authors of *Transformational Discipleship* write, “For a church to be deficient in discipleship is to be deficient in its fundamental reason for existence. If any organization is careless in its core reason for existence, it doesn't matter if the organization excels at

²² Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 21.

other things.”²³ If a congregation grows with new members, has larger budgets, and builds new buildings, but fails at creating disciples, it will not have a transformative impact on the culture it is called to engage.

Growing numbers cannot automatically be equated to growing disciples. How can Christians grow, transform, and challenge the culture without being disciples of Jesus? In many ways Christians are failing to reach the people that are coming to church, so how can they ever be expected to reach the people outside of church? Jesus has called his followers to make disciples. However, in recent years that evangelistic call has been transformed into a onetime salvation prayer instead a lifetime commitment to Christ. Discipleship is a lifelong process in which Christians are being discipled and discipling others. As the church of Jesus Christ, if transformation of the world through the lives of people is to take place, it begins with making disciples. This will not be easy, but Jesus never said that it would be. William Barclay writes, “No one could ever say that he was induced to follow Jesus by false pretense. Jesus never tried to bribe men by the offer of an easy way.”²⁴ But it is the way by which Christians can change the world and participate in God’s total redemption of his creation.

What the American church needs is renewal, a moment to hit a reset button and focus on what discipleship really looks like. Renewal seems to be at the heart of just about every church’s mission these days. The call for renewal in the church can often conjure up images of old tent revivals or an evangelistic outreach in which people are invited to church in order to be converted by professional evangelizers, the pastors. When I asked around my current congregation what we needed to do in order to see renewal in

²³ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*, (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 2, Kindle.

²⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 201.

our local church the answers from almost every one of them was one of two responses. First, “Invite people to church.” Second, “Have events that we can invite people to that are not church. Then they will see how great we are and want to come back.” Never mind the egotistical way of thinking that people will see our greatness and want to participate in our lives just because they are in our presence. These have become on our missional and evangelistic approaches. While they come with every good intention, they are not the pathway for congregational renewal and they are not evangelistic in nature. We cannot trick people into a relationship with God.

The call for renewal for many means that the church must become relevant in order to attract today’s modern culture. From buildings to worship style, everything must model the culture in order to be relevant in people’s lives. Some congregations go to great lengths to make these changes. The problem is that our culture shifts so fast it is almost impossible to continue to keep up. Relevance is a shaky foundation because everything is always changing. If a church can’t keep up with the changes it will quickly become irrelevant. While it may work for a period of time, it is a thin veil when it comes to true renewal. Frankly, you would be hard pressed to find anything from Jesus that calls the church to relevance. Jesus is quite clear that his followers should live counter-culturally.

The foundation for renewal is not relevance, but engagement and consequently, discipleship. Clayton Schmidt writes, “For we are not the church of another age. We are the church of the twenty-first century and need to provide worship opportunities that *engage* people of this culture. It will no longer do to prepare people for a church that does

not exist.”²⁵ (emphasis added). The gospel, while it doesn’t call Christians to be relevant, does call Christians to engage others with its radical message of grace, love, and justice. There is a major difference between engagement and relevancy. Being the church of the 21st century means a different strategy is needed than Christendom or attractional churches. This strategy includes how worship and mission are envisioned. Renewal is not about looking like the culture, but about engaging it with the message of the risen Christ.

Renewal is not born out of invitations to church, by being culturally relevant institutions, or by tricking people into a life of faith. At the heart of revitalization is an invitation to discipleship. It is a mistake to separate conversion to faith and a life of discipleship because each is dependent on the other. Discipleship should and does impact every aspect of the church. At the heart of mission, evangelism, worship, and stewardship is a disciple who is deeply and radically committed to following Jesus.

Therefore, how worship is understood is radically different than the mission strategy to get more people to church. Worship plays a vital role in the life of a disciple, equipping, renewing, and sending each one out into the world to live as the people of God. Worship should not be seen as a weekly obligation or a way of making the world more comfortable. “Worship is a response to our Redeemer. The heart of Christian worship is love for Christ. We cannot love him without extolling His greatness, confessing our weaknesses, seeking His goodness, thanking Him for His grace, and living for His glory.”²⁶ Worship, simply put, is each disciple’s response to God. The disciple is then sent into the world for Christ’s mission. Jamie Smith writes, “Drawn into union with

²⁵ Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 177-179, Kindle.

²⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 78.

Christ, the ‘end’ of Christian worship is bound up with our sending for Christian action, rightly ordered cultural labor, the creational task of making and remaking God’s world. We are (re)made to be makers.”²⁷

Disciples of Jesus worship. It’s not just what they do, but it is who they are. They respond to God’s actions in the world, recognize his glory, confess their sins, and go out to live as his people inviting others to join. Worship is not just part of God’s plan for the renewal of his church, it is God’s plan. Worship tells a story, God’s story of redemption playing out in the person of Jesus Christ. “Church leaders (throughout history) recognized early on that what we do in worship and the order in which we do it convey messages about God, us, and our relationship.”²⁸ Worship tells our story as people who bear the image of God.

Therefore, the answer to the problems facing the American church when it comes to worship, mission, and evangelism is found in those who are truly seeking to be disciples of Jesus. Discipleship multiplies. According to the authors of *Transformational Discipleship*, “God shapes congregations through the shaping of individual lives. Further, this shaping of individuals doesn’t just happen; it’s through intentional effort on the part of both leaders and church members.”²⁹ Geiger, Kelley and Nation continue, “Transformation is the bottom-line result of true discipleship.”³⁰

It is my contention that if renewal in the American church is going to take place, we must be concerned with making true and committed disciples of Jesus Christ. We

²⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 380-383, Kindle.

²⁸ Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 235.

²⁹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 2, Kindle.

³⁰ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 12, Kindle.

need to look no further than the gospel itself to understand how this is possible. Jesus made disciples by pouring his life into others. Transformation of the local congregation happens by modeling how Jesus disciplined people throughout his ministry on this earth. Biblical discipleship models Jesus. It fosters authentic community and transforms the whole of a person. It impacts every aspect of a Christian's life. If transformation of the local congregation is the goal, the way to get there is through transformation of individual disciples.

The Jesus Model

It is easy to confuse education with discipleship. As has already been stated, if discipleship was simply knowledge about Jesus the problems we face would most likely have already been solved. The outcome of discipleship, according to Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, reaches far beyond what a person knows, "The end result of discipleship is not merely the knowledge of all Jesus commanded but the obedience to all Jesus commanded."³¹ Discipleship leads people to encounter Jesus in relationship, "Churches that are transformational in discipleship help people encounter Jesus as Lord and not merely as Rabbi."³² Our goal as Christians should not be to simply educate people about Jesus, but to introduce him to them. Ultimately, we should not pursue people in order to grow the church, but to make disciples.

Mike Breen writes, "No one accidentally creates disciples. Discipleship is an intentional pursuit."³³ Jesus pursued his disciples and invited them into a relationship

³¹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 18, Kindle.

³² Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 20, Kindle.

³³ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011), 208-209, Kindle.

with him. Throughout the gospels there is an invitation for the disciples to live with Jesus, learn from Jesus, and to do ministry with Jesus. As Francis Chan argues,

It's impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6: 40). That's the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: we imitate Him, carry on His ministry, and become like Him in the process.³⁴

Jesus modeled relational and intentional discipleship throughout the gospels. This results in relationships, according to Chan and Beuving, "True discipleship involves deep relationships. Jesus didn't simply lead a weekly Bible study. He lived life with His disciples and taught through actions as well as words."³⁵ If renewal and transformation are to take place in the local congregation, the Bible and how Jesus disciplined his followers should be the primary example of what it means to be a movement of God's people. It is my contention that the church cannot be a mission focused congregation without being a discipling congregation. In the same manner, the church cannot be a worshiping congregation without being a discipling congregation. I believe the future of American Christianity is not found in the programs of a church, but in disciples who are willing to make disciples. This thesis will focus heavily on what discipleship is, what it looks like, and how it is accomplished in community. True discipleship models what Jesus does with his followers in the gospels.

Jesus commanded his disciples after his resurrection to be disciple makers (Matthew 28:19). He showed them how to do this, because he did it for them. Disciple making is about multiplying. It is not just about adding more people to a particular group, as Breen writes, "Huddles do not grow by adding new members; Huddles grow when

³⁴ Chan, Francis and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (CO Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 16, Kindle.

³⁵ Chan and Bauving, *Multiply*, 16, Kindle.

members of your Huddle start their own.”³⁶ The Jesus model of discipleship is about the whole of life and it affects the whole church (universal). At the heart of transformation for any local congregation, is a disciple making mindset that is not focused on the growth of the church, but the life of the person who encounters Jesus. It is not a program. It is an intentional invitation to a new life with the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This relationship multiplies and is replicated in new disciples. Disciples make disciples, not for the growth of the church, but for the glory of God because that is what Jesus did.

³⁶ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 502, Kindle.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Discipleship is expected in the Christian life. It is a calling placed on all who follow Jesus and it is found in the heart of the gospel. In order to achieve true discipleship, a basic understanding of God's story of redemption is necessary. Disciples of Jesus should see the whole Scripture, for the whole person, for the whole creation.¹ God's story of redemption played out in the pages of Scripture and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not just a moment in history, but an invitation to participate in the Kingdom of God. God's plan for the redemption of the world happens through discipleship.

Many believe that mission begins with the Great Commission. Jesus tasks his disciples after the resurrection to go and make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28. I would contend that the Great Commission is more about discipleship than mission. When faced with the issue of salvation, many Christians understand the process as something like this; fall, redemption, heaven. This leads to a belief that redemption is solely about personal salvation. However, the mission of God does not begin with the fall and end with eternal life; it begins with creation and ends with God's new Creation.² Mission is the story of God's redemption in history, the present, and the future. A Biblical understanding of discipleship is about the mission of God in the world and participating in it in the form of community, worship, and evangelism. Discipleship from a Biblical perspective encompasses the whole of a person.

¹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 192-194, Kindle.

² Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 63-64, Kindle.

Thinking Small

When we think about discipleship we often think about church, worship, and conversion. For a number of Christians the vision is about how many people can be gathered, but rarely are our conversations and vision for mission centered on relationships. Jesus definitely preached to large crowds throughout the course of his earthly ministry in Israel. The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapters 5-7 is preached to his disciples and to a large group. When Jesus feeds the multitudes in Mark 6, he had been teaching and preaching at the time. Even the disciples in the early church preached to large crowds. Peter, after the Ascension of Jesus in Acts 2, preaches to the multitudes and thousands of people are converted to Christ that day. If in all of these instances of conversion to faith in Jesus these new disciples were left to figure out their faith individually, the church would have ceased to exist thousands of years ago. It took disciple making to ensure that these new converts continued to follow the teachings of Jesus and participated in the mission of God. That is what laid the foundations for the future church. Discipleship was the mission, and redemption the outcome.

Jesus preached to the multitudes and had many followers, but that was not the primary focus of his ministry. Jesus poured most his time and energy into the twelve, the apostles, whom he specifically chose, “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”³ It is through these twelve men, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the good news of Jesus

³ Luke 6:12-13 (NIV)

will be shared. Ogden says that, “Jesus had enough vision to think small.”⁴ Jesus most likely could have created a mass movement of people or even started a localized rebellion against Rome. However, he knew that if he intentionally disciplined the twelve, the impact of the gospel would be far greater. Jesus works on the principle of multiplication. If each disciple understands the Great Commission to make disciples, Christians would multiply exponentially. As Ogden writes, “By focusing on a few Jesus was able to ensure the lasting nature of his mission.”⁵

Discipleship is intimate and requires relationships. It cannot be just a weekly gathering of handshakes and smiles. According to Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, “True discipleship involves deep relationships. Jesus didn’t simply lead a weekly Bible study. He lived life with His disciples and taught through actions as well as words.”⁶ If it is true that honest discipleship involves deep relationships, it cannot only happen through a weekly hour of worship. Relationship implies a connection. That does not mean that the connection is always positive. The way people are connected can be strong or weak. Relationships can be good or bad. Therefore, the goal of discipleship is not about having a common place of worship, but something that goes much deeper. A relationship that results in true discipleship is intimate, deep, and strong. It requires vulnerability and honesty. As Chan and Beuving write, “Discipleship is all about living life together rather than just one structured meeting per week.”⁷

⁴ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 20.

⁵ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, 20.

⁶ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (CO Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 10, Kindle.

⁷ Chan and Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*, 11, Kindle.

Jesus lived life with his disciples. He showed them the day to day way of life that comes with being one of his followers. They were with him when he prayed, ate, and lived life in day to day activities. The disciples did not just learn about Jesus, they learned from him. They were witnesses to how he lived. They were taught by him and lived in fellowship with him. Discipleship was immersive and it was that discipleship that brought about transformation. Alan Hirsch contends that Jesus' disciples followed him before their conversion.⁸ It was only over time, by learning from Jesus and living with him, that they recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Peter does name Jesus as the Messiah, but not until past the midpoint of the gospel story in Matthew 16. It is through their relationship with Jesus that the apostles actually become disciples.

Ultimately, discipleship is about being with Jesus. It embodies the whole of a person. Evangelism should be reframed within the context of discipleship. It should not simply be about conversion. The church needs to have enough vision to think small. In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit arrived at Pentecost and the disciples began to speak in the native tongue of those who were gathered. Some wrote them off as being drunk, but Peter begins to preach. According to verse 41 about 3,000 people converted to Jesus that day. The key here is that the disciples do not leave the new converts to go on their own. They are engaged in relationship that fosters discipleship. As William Willimon writes, "The church moves immediately to the task of teaching, keeping itself straight about what it is and what is to be about."⁹ According to Acts 2:42-47,

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe

⁸ Alan Hirsch, "Reimagining Jesus: Re-calibrating the Church for the 21st Century." Presented at The World Mission Initiative Conference at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 9-10, 2016.

⁹ Willimon, William H., *Acts: Interpretation Commentary* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 40.

at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.¹⁰

Many believe that Acts 2 is where the physical Christian church begins after the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and in many ways it is. However, the continual thread throughout this passage is about discipleship, following in the way of Jesus. After conversion they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, meaning the teachings of Jesus, "The 'teachings of the apostles' refers to a body of material that was considered authoritative because it was the message about Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed by accredited apostles."¹¹ Disciples have the responsibility to teach other disciples. Knowledge is an important aspect of discipleship. However, knowledge that does not lead to a transformed life or a different way of community is not true discipleship.

In Acts the new converts do not simply learn about Jesus, they lived in community together. They committed to fellowship, breaking of bread, and to prayer. They shared with one another and lived in communion with everyone. This fellowship, according to Willimon, "produced astounding 'wonders and signs' (2:43), not the least of which was that 'all who believed were together and had everything in common,' selling their possessions and distributing them to all."¹² This is intentional and relational discipleship. Their conversions did not lead them to be church goers or giving units. The

¹⁰ Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

¹¹ Gaebelein, Frank E., J. D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, and Richard N. Longenecker, *John – Acts*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), 288.

¹² Willimon, *Acts: Interpretation Commentary*, 40.

experience invited them into a deep, intentional relationship that fostered a new way of life together.

The modern church can learn from the early church about discipleship, “In all these activities of teaching, fellowship and sharing, breaking of bread and prayer we see a well-rounded picture of the church, the marks of an authentic embodiment of the Spirit in the community’s life, a canon for the measurement of the church’s activity today.”¹³

While the early church was experiencing mass conversions, it is clear that through intentional community, discipleship was taking place. It was not about programs, dynamic worship, and missional strategies. It was about community fostered in the teachings of Jesus and life together.

Going Deeper

To take the idea of thinking small about discipleship even deeper, there is evidence in the gospels that Jesus focused his time and energy even more into three specific apostles. Peter, James, and John seem to be invited by Jesus to go a little further or deeper than the rest on multiple occasions. For example, the Transfiguration in Matthew 17, where Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus on the mountainside, the three men were with him. Once again only these three are with Jesus in Mark 5:37-42 when Jesus raises the young girl from the dead. Finally, it is Peter, James, and John who Jesus asked to go with him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with him in Mark 14:32-36 on the night of his betrayal. On top of all of these events, Jesus gives Peter a special distinction as the rock on which his church will be built in Matthew 16:18. While it is not clear why these distinctions are made, it is safe to assume that Jesus spent much of his time with the twelve and then even more with these three men.

¹³ Willimon, *Acts: Interpretation Commentary*, 42.

If the focus of Jesus' discipleship was small and intimate groups, why do so many think preaching to the masses on Sunday and maybe a Sunday school class is enough to make disciples? One reason for this is the fact that preaching and Sunday school appeals to consumers. People can get what they like or need and go about their lives unchanged day to day. Discipleship built on relationships is more time consuming and more difficult than just attending a normal worship service. A person does not have to give up their life, something discipleship calls for, to attend church and go to Sunday school. People want to maintain control over their lives and be a Christian at the same time, which is difficult to do as a committed disciple of Jesus.

In the discipleship concept witnessed in Scripture, Jesus concentrates on relationships with others. The gospel calls for discipleship fostered in relationship. However, this relationship does not mean the road will be easy or that every relationship will bring about discipleship. According to the Gospel of Luke,

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'¹⁴

Discipleship calls for us to surrender to Jesus. While the reading of this passage may sound harsh because of the use of the word hate, Jesus demands the disciple's entire heart. There should not be any relationship that is more important in life than a Christian's relationship with Jesus, "Hate is used figuratively and suggests a priority of relationship. Jesus is first. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus, not anyone or anything

¹⁴ Luke 14:25-27 (NIV)

else.”¹⁵ We live in a world that is constantly competing for our hearts. Jesus wants to make sure that his disciples are only following him, as Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters.”¹⁶ The standard Jesus sets is that discipleship requires relationship and the primary relationship should be with him and no one else.

Relationship, experienced in love, is why disciples will pick up their cross and follow. Through the cross of Jesus his love can be understood and because of this love Christians can pick up their cross and follow. Discipleship is serious business that will not be easy. It is important for every potential disciple to count the cost of following him because it asks for the whole life. This is why discipleship within the life of the church cannot simply be the passing of information from one person to the next. Knowledge is important and knowing the Bible is vital. However, as Chan and Beuving argue, “We study the Bible to learn about who God is, who we are, and what God is doing in our world. The Bible compels us to join God in what He is doing in and around us. Studying the Bible is important, but the goal is never knowledge for the sake of knowledge.”¹⁷

One of the key issues for discipleship is being an image bearer of Jesus. As John 14:15 says, “If you love me, keep my commands.”¹⁸ How a disciple lives and behaves is an indication of true discipleship and an expression of love, “Learning from Jesus means following him, experiencing the rejection he experienced and so bearing the cross he bore. We cannot “learn Jesus” without being prepared to walk this path.”¹⁹ The call to pick up ‘our crosses’ is to count ourselves as already dead. Ogden points out that a

¹⁵ “Pure Discipleship,” *Luke 14 Commentary*, (IVP Press), <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Luke/Pure-Discipleship> (accessed June 11, 2014).

¹⁶ Matt 6:24 (NIV)

¹⁷ Chan and Bauving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*, 14.

¹⁸ John 14:15 (NIV)

¹⁹ “Pure Discipleship,” *Luke 14 Commentary*.

criminal only picked up their cross after the sentence had been cast.²⁰ This image would be a powerful one for those who were listening to the words of Jesus. Picking up our crosses calls us to daily die and to allow Christ to live in us. We're reminded that, "The road to Easter goes through Good Friday. The road to new life goes through the death of the old. The road to resurrection goes through crucifixion. Jesus calls us to walk that road, the road he walked."²¹

When the cost of discipleship is counted, people often choose not to follow. Conversion to Christ is only the first step in discipleship. Committing to Christ leads to disciples eventually picking up their crosses and going the way of Jesus. The Christian life that leads to discipleship requires commitment. Not just a one time commitment to faith, but a lifelong commitment to Jesus, "Discipleship is basically allegiance. To follow Jesus is to rely on him."²² God's plan to reach the world through his people is not found in marvelous displays or attractional buildings and programs. It is found in the heart of the disciple who is willing to pick up their cross and follow Jesus because they know that they are beloved child of God.

Passing the Torch

According to The Permanent Revolution, "Christianity is about living out an ethos that is embodied in our founders and pioneers; this is called discipleship because it follows in the way of those who opened up the passage for us in the first place. Jesus's apostolic ministry sets the primary agenda for the entire Christian movement, then and

²⁰ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, 29.

²¹ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, 30.

²² "Pure Discipleship," Luke 14 Commentary.

now.”²³ To understand the outcome of discipleship and the often messy relationships that happen in the process, the relationship between Paul and Timothy in the New Testament is a primary example.

Paul, considered to be the apostle to the Gentiles, has a strong relationship with Timothy. Paul has taught him everything he knows about ministry and about faith in Christ. He writes these words to Timothy, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”²⁴ It is evident that Paul views his relationship with Timothy as both the passing of information about God and a relationship with Jesus as the basis for discipleship. Paul writes, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” as a call to remember the faith we have in him, which offers disciples grace to continue in the work of the gospel. The primary relationship is not Paul and Timothy, but Jesus and Timothy.

Disciples are polished, and ultimately strengthened, in the grace of Jesus, “There is grace enough in him for all of us. We must be strong in this grace; not in ourselves, in our own strength, or in the grace we have already received, but in the grace that is in him, and that is the way to be strong in grace.”²⁵ It is through Timothy’s relationship with Paul that he experiences the person of Christ in his life. But as is the case with discipleship, Timothy finds his strength not in Paul, but through the grace of Jesus.

Being a disciple, as Timothy is to Paul and Paul is to Christ, also requires instruction as Paul writes, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of

²³ Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim, and Mike Breen, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 4681-4683, Kindle.

²⁴ 2 Tim 2:1-2 (NIV)

²⁵ Matthew Henry, “2 Timothy 2,” BibleStudyTools.com, (accessed June 11, 2014).

many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” Paul instructs Timothy in the concept of multiplication. Being a disciple is not just a personal journey, it comes with an obligation to take others along the path toward Christ with you. Timothy, according to Paul, was “to commit them as a trust, as a sacred deposit, which they were to keep, and to transmit pure and uncorrupt unto others. Those to whom he was to commit these things must be faithful, that is, trusty men, and who were skillful to teach others.”²⁶ According to Scripture, discipleship is not conversion, although conversion is the starting point. Discipleship is two-fold. First, it is a relationship with Christ that consists of being committed to following him. That relationship with Jesus is fostered by a relationship with another disciple, like Paul to Timothy. Second, it is bringing others along for the journey, like Timothy to others.

If Christians want to make an impact that brings about transformation in the lives of others they should look to Scripture and to Jesus’ model of discipleship. God’s larger story of redemption is found in people who are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. Sunday morning services and once a week Bible study will not be enough for the church to survive in today’s rapidly changing culture. Discipleship is how Christians live life together, not just how Christians meet together on Sunday mornings.

It is through building intentional communities and intentional relationships that foster disciples for Jesus Christ that the church will begin to experience revitalization. As Wright contends, “Mission to the nations is ethical at its core, for it demands lives committed to obedience to the Lord, which become self-replicating through the work of evangelism (baptism) and discipling (teaching).”²⁷ This will not be accomplished by

²⁶ Henry, “2 Timothy 2.”

²⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 1539-1540, Kindle.

simply preaching to the masses, but through the long, hard, and sometimes awkward task of building relationships with the intention of growing in Christ together.

Discipleship and Mission According to the Great Commission

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew is the most famous and well-known call to discipleship. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 reads,

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”²⁸

Jesus puts forward a very clear mission for his followers; they are to make disciples of all nations. This command does not just call Christians to introduce people to Christ, but to bring them into a relationship that requires baptism, teaching, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. According to the Great Commission, what does it mean for the people of God to make disciples?

Jesus claims all authority in both heaven and earth, “The Son of Man, who was once handed over to the authority of others, now has authority over everyone.”²⁹ It is this shift that shows the power of the resurrection. Jesus was handed over to the religious and political leaders of his time, some of the most powerful people of his day. As he meets with his disciples after the resurrection, he claims authority not just over them and the church, but over his oppressors as well. It is in this victory that Jesus lays the foundation for the ministry of his disciples and followers which he ordained. The church was formed

²⁸ Matt 28:18-20 (NIV)

²⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 546.

in the authority of Jesus, handed to his disciples, to make disciples. Because Jesus has authority, he commands his followers to “go and make.”

It is clear that Jesus does not hand us his authority in the Great Commission. He simply commands us through his authority to do what he had done. Dale Bruner writes, “All authority is his and his alone. We are never told that we have any power or authority, but we know where to look for it.”³⁰ Jesus does not give his disciples options when it comes to the Great Commission. He does not command them to build big buildings, create programs, or bribe people to faith. He commands his disciples with the difficult task of converting not just the Jews, but the nations. It is not with big flashy displays or salvation prayers. Disciples are made with relationships that have life transforming impact. Doug Everts and Doug Schaupp contend that while Scripture is vitally important in the life of faith, quoting Bible verses is not a missional strategy. According to them we need relationships, “Many may say, ‘Can't we just focus on Bible verses that better connect with the postmodern generation?’ No, we cannot. Relationships, genuine friendships are our currency.”³¹

The Great Commission is a call to all nations, which reaches back to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12:1-3 where Abraham is promised that “all nations would be blessed through him.”³² This command gives Christians a vision for the world and their ministry beyond the walls of the church. As Ogden writes, “When Jesus commanded his disciples to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ he spoke the mission statement for the church. Jesus told his disciples to do what he had done during his three

³⁰ Dale Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) 816.

³¹ Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 240-241, Kindle.

³² Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook Matthew, 13-28* 817.

years of ministry. Jesus made disciples by selecting a few into whom he poured his life.”³³

The mission of the church is not just about going out and converting all nations in the name of Jesus. While conversion is part of the process, the mission given from Jesus is to make disciples. Conversion is not a onetime act, but a life altering experience that calls followers to a different way of life. At the point of conversion a process of discipleship begins that compels Christians be more like Christ each day. The gospel calls disciples to daily conversion. This process begins with baptism, which is part of this Great Commission, and “Undergoing baptism is part of the imitation of Christ.”³⁴ When Jesus is baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist in Matthew, his identity is revealed. According to Matthew 3, “And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”³⁵ It is in baptism that the disciple is marked as a child of God and called to his service. It is in baptism that a disciple’s identity is revealed.

However, there is more to being a disciple than being baptized. Disciples must also learn from Jesus and dwell in his Word. This results in an active faith and “if we remove action from the equation of learning, we end up with an academic understanding of the faith and little by way of genuine discipleship.”³⁶ The second part of disciple making according to the Great Commission is “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”³⁷ The apostles, who have been sitting at Jesus’ feet learning for three

³³ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, 20.

³⁴ Allison & Davies, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary*, 547.

³⁵ Matt 3:17 (NIV)

³⁶ Hirsch, Alan and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*, 2027-2028, Kindle.

³⁷ Matt 28:20a (NIV)

years, are now called to carry out those teachings to others, an example of active faith. Disciples are called to disciple in the teachings of Christ. This becomes part of the mission of the church.

According to Allison and Davies, “By teaching what Jesus taught, the church becomes an extension of his ministry.”³⁸ Once again, discipleship requires that the entire message of Christ be taught to those who choose to follow him. Jesus instructs his disciples to teach “everything” that he had commanded. That does not mean just the beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, or the parables but every word that was spoken. Making disciples requires that everything Jesus taught be handed down to his followers. Teaching and learning are a constant part of life for disciples of Jesus.

Disciples cannot just learn about Jesus and then stop. By forming a relationship with Jesus our knowledge of him deepens. However, it is a constant and often slow practice. The process of discipleship teaches that disciples be baptized and learn what it means to follow Jesus, but this is a lifelong commitment. While baptism is a onetime event, learning takes time. According to Bruner,

Teaching is another slow word. All three of the main responsibility verbs in this commission – disciple, baptize, teach – are three slow, corporate, and earthy ways of circling the same object, saying the same thing: disciple people – take your time with them, work carefully with them, bring them along gently. First, we disciple by living among people and talking with the inquiring; then by baptizing the convinced in a simple church meetings; and then by teaching the baptized and ourselves an ever-increasing loyalty to Jesus’ commands.³⁹

Being a disciple-maker does not happen overnight. The disciples spent years with Jesus before they went out and made disciples.

³⁸ Allison & Davies, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary*, 547.

³⁹ Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook Matthew 13-28*, 824.

True discipleship takes time, patience, and relationship. It takes a lifetime commitment to Jesus, his followers, and his church. Becoming a disciple-maker is a developing process. It would be nice if it was instantaneous. However, that is not how the disciple to disciple-maker process works. The Great Commission is a commission to discipleship. The mission of the church flows from people who are committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ, which is what the Great Commission really calls followers of Jesus to do. It takes time, but it is time worth spending.

Worship, Evangelism, and Discipleship

Worship is a Scriptural construct in which the people of God experience the redemption of God as revealed to us in his Word. This forms our liturgy and “this increasingly accepted liturgical format is identified in four movements: gathering, Word, sacraments, sending.”⁴⁰ Each of these movements flow from Biblical concepts. As the order of worship begins to play out, those who are participating in it should see the story of God’s grace unfold before their eyes. From the gathering to the sending the people of God are witnessing the greatness of God. While Scripture does not provide a distinct way in which worship should be styled (i.e. contemporary v. traditional in modern terms), it does set the stage for how worship is ordered and why worship exists, which ultimately impacts our discipleship.

Worship has always been a part of life for those who follow God. Throughout the Bible, from the beginning, the people of God worship God. As the nation of Israel comes up out of Egypt and the land of slavery, they are given a command to worship God alone. The first two Commandments are really about worship. The first, “You shall have no

⁴⁰ Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 304-305, Kindle.

other gods before me.” The second, “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.”⁴¹

Through the Ten Commandments God is establishing a covenant relationship with his creation, specifically his people. As Gowan writes, “His love for us led him to give us the knowledge that he is our creator, and led him to make us more than ‘creatures,’ for how could mere creatures be partners in a relationship with the Holy One?”⁴² This is not establishing a partnership where all things are equal, but rather a partnership where we participate in and are invited into the glory of God. The first commandment says, “God comes first and our relationship to him is of upmost importance.” This is what Jesus requires from his disciples. It establishes a relationship and the basis of for all the other commandments.⁴³ The act of worship is a participation in the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a call to discipleship in the same way that our relationship to Christ is of the utmost importance.

Some argue that this commandment acknowledges other gods by using the phrase, “no other gods before me.” However, the other gods are immaterial to the only God who is worthy of praise. It is a call to worship God alone, “The First Commandment does not deny the existence of other gods, but the question of their existence is irrelevant to God’s claim, for as far as Israel is concerned, it makes no difference whether there are other

⁴¹ Exod 20:3-5 NIV

⁴² Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 179.

⁴³ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 224.

gods or not.”⁴⁴ The commandment is about relationship and this relationship compels God’s children worship him.

He is worthy of worship, which is the second commandment. As Harrelson writes,

No cultic representation can do justice to the living God; only human beings can be a kind of representation of God on earth, and they must be such a representation not at the cult center where their representation is set up, but in daily life, demonstrating faithfulness to the commandments of the God who created them.⁴⁵

The commandment to not bow down to idols is about the worship of God alone. This worship, however, is not just about what takes place in church. It is about how we live in the world. Do we bow down to the idols of the world, ‘their gods’, or do we bow down before the one who is above all things? Terrence Fretheim claims, “The worshipers of the golden calf were engaged fundamentally in a false theology, which led to a false worship, believing that an image, even of Yahweh, could have accomplished their redemption.”⁴⁶ A false theology of worship leads to a false act of worship. It becomes idolatry in the highest form. In God’s established covenant his people are called to worship him, not to make his image, but be his image bearers.

Worship as action is not just found in the Ten Commandments. Worship is found in structure, both within a service and in everyday human life. As the Ark of the Covenant is brought to Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 16 King David gives the people of God clear instructions on what worship is and how it is to be done. The movement, or ‘ordo’,

⁴⁴ Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 180.

⁴⁵ Walter J. Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights*. (Philadelphia, PA Fortress Press, 1980), 64.

⁴⁶ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 226.

of worship is evident in his instructions. While it may not follow the same order, they are all present within the passage and useful in our understanding of the act of worship.

David instructs, “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.”⁴⁷ In the gathering of worship, we seek the Lord with all of our heart. We come before him, meaning gathering together with God, in order to give praise to him. In that proclamation of his name, we make his name known to the world. This is the mission of the church. As Mark Labberton writes, “Our mission depends on our worship.”⁴⁸ Disciples glory in God’s presence, rejoice in his name, and make his name known to the world.

The second ordo of worship is the Word. In the proclamation of the Word we hear God’s story and remember all that he has done for us and through us. We hope and proclaim what God will do in the future. David commands, “Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, you his servants, the descendants of Israel, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob. He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth.”⁴⁹ In worship we proclaim and remember the wonders of God, his miracles, and his law. Worship is the response of the disciple to God’s action in the world. The Word is about hearing God’s Word to us as his people. We testify to the greatness of God.

The third ordo of worship is the sacraments, or in some cases, the response to the Word when the sacraments are not performed weekly. David instructs,

⁴⁷ 1 Chr 16:8-10 (NIV)

⁴⁸ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 1429, Kindle.

⁴⁹ 1 Chr 16:12-14 (NIV)

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: 'To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.'⁵⁰

The God we worship is a covenanting God. This is his nature. To participate in worship is to remember his covenant with us. We do this through baptism and communion.

Participation in the sacraments is not solely about us remembering an event in the past. It is active involvement in the life of Christ and the promises of God. The sacraments, according to Clayton Schmit, “are means of grace that God uses to call, inspire, and feed disciples for the service and proclamation they take into the world.”⁵¹

Finally, the last ordo is the sending. The benediction is not the end of worship, it is simply the beginning. Worship is a way of life and what happens in a worship service is simply the sending of God’s people. David declares, “Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.”⁵² The role of the disciple is to make God’s name known. Worship is not simply about a personal or emotional experience in the presence of God. Worship is about declaring his name to ALL people and ALL nations as commanded in the Great Commission. The word all is emphasized because it moves us from an individual mindset to a human mindset when it comes to the mission of the church. As Schmit contends, “The way we live inside church is to be identical to the way we live outside. The sending is the point of integration whereby worship and mission flow

⁵⁰ 1 Chr 16:15-18 (NIV)

⁵¹ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 3527-3528, Kindle.

⁵² 1 Chr 16:23-24 (NIV)

together.”⁵³ This is discipleship and this discipleship sends people into the world to be disciple-makers.

Worship is our way of life. Therefore, it is necessary for the disciple of Jesus to grasp the concept and meaning of worship. Jesus tells his disciples to worship God with all that they are and all that they have. When challenged by the teachers of the law on the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”⁵⁴ Jesus’ response to these teachers informs us, the people of God, how to live. We love God with our entire self and love our neighbors the same way, “The three faculties, ‘heart’, ‘soul’, and ‘mind’, first of all represent the entire person; so the demand is for total allegiance: one should love God with every globule of one’s being.”⁵⁵

The command to love God and love others is why worship is so important in the life of a disciple. These are not mutually exclusive items. You cannot have one without the other. There is not a better way for us to love God than for us to love our neighbor. Brunner argues, “Jesus had not been asked for the two main commandments in the law; he had only been asked for the single main commandment. When, therefore, Jesus gratuitously gives a second answer, he is saying in so many words that the question for one main principle is too narrow.”⁵⁶ To worship God is to love God. To love God is to love the world. This is what disciples do. The mission of the church is found in the

⁵³ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 663-664, Kindle.

⁵⁴ Matt 22:37-40 (NIV)

⁵⁵ Allison and Davies, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary*, 381.

⁵⁶ Brunner, *Matthew: The Churchbook Matthew 13-28*, 414.

sending of the church out into the world to love sinners. In order to do this effectively, we must offer all that we are to God and doing so is an act of worship.

Paul urges the church in Rome to live out their faith as an act of worship. He writes in Romans 12:1-2,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.⁵⁷

Worship is our response to grace and “Paul tells his readers that their proper response to their creator is the shaping of their total lives by his gracious will. Like a burnt offering given wholly to God, the Christian (disciple) is to be a total sacrifice to God, and that sacrifice is to consist of the whole life.”⁵⁸ Christians are not to be formed by the patterns and thinking of the culture and world around them. They are to be shaped in the image of Christ, offering their lives to God. Faith then is not relegated to Sunday morning service, but to a way of living in which our lives are changed and reflect the image of Christ each day. According to Paul, this is our true act of worship.

Therefore, the worship service must consist of changed people hearing God's voice and seeking change in the communities to which they have been called. Worship is not an element of the Christian life, it is the Christian life. Worship cannot be detached from the life of the disciple. Harrison contends, “Dedication leads to discernment and discernment to delight in God's will. That there is an intimate connection between certifying the will of God and making oneself a living sacrifice is indicated by the use of

⁵⁷ Rom 12:1-2 (NIV)

⁵⁸ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 195.

the ‘pleasing in each case.’⁵⁹ The disciple’s life is a radically transformed life. How each disciple lives is married to how each disciple worships. The two concepts cannot be separated from one another. How a disciple worships impacts how a disciple evangelizes. Worship, through its structure and order, forms the character and soul of Christ’s disciples to go and live for him.

An Image of Discipleship

Much of this chapter has focused on what discipleship is not. However, what steps can a congregation or individual Christians take to embody a healthier vision of discipleship? We have already referenced Jesus’ call to the apostles in Luke 6. To gain more clarity about what discipleship looks like and the steps to take to get there, the call of the apostles in Mark 4 paints a beautiful picture for us. According to Mark, “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”⁶⁰

The first thing we learn from this text about the ‘how’ of discipleship is that Jesus is the standard bearer for the community. Jesus called those whom he had chosen. James Edwards writes, “The society into which he calls them is determined not by their preferences but by his summons.”⁶¹ Each disciple has a responsibility to respond to call of Christ, but the community is not based on personal preference rather the call of Jesus. Edwards continues, “As described by Mark, Jesus’ program is of a different order. Jesus

⁵⁹ Everett Harrison, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1995), 128.

⁶⁰ Mark 4:13-15 (NIV)

⁶¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 111.

is the sole and exclusive subject of the call.”⁶² Because discipleship happens in relationships, like Jesus, we should commit ourselves to smaller groups in which Jesus is the sole and exclusive subject.

Second, Jesus appointed the 12 according to Mark “that they might be with him.” Discipleship requires that we spend time with Jesus. Disciples dwell in the presence of Jesus because they have been invited by him. As stated by Edwards, “The question is what Jesus can make of his disciples, not what they can be on their own.”⁶³ By committing to other disciples we are committing to Jesus and dwelling in his presence. This is where a church can help foster Biblical discipleship. It can provide opportunity to abide in God’s Word and in Christ’s presence.

Third, and finally, Jesus sent them out to preach and drive out demons. Christian discipleship is not about what followers can do for Jesus, but what Jesus can do through his called community. That’s what Edwards means when he writes, “The twelve are constituted to *be with him*, and *to be sent*. Apostleship is thus a matter of *being* and *being sent*, of who one is in relationship to Jesus and what one does a result of that relationship.”⁶⁴ Therefore, true discipleship based on a Biblical understanding is a matter of being with Jesus, being sent by Jesus, and acting in Jesus’ name.

These three things (calling, dwelling, and sending) are not something the church can do, but what Jesus does through his disciples. A local congregation can help foster these things through a more relational approach to discipleship. Instead of thinking big, the local church should be thinking small. This is more than just creating small groups. That is not to say that small groups are ineffective or wrong. However, true discipleship

⁶² Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 112.

⁶³ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 112.

⁶⁴ Edwards, 113.

must go beyond Christian fellowship and knowledge. By creating discipleship groups a local church can foster a Biblical model of discipleship that focuses on relationships, worship, and mission as Jesus does with the apostles in Mark 4.

Conclusion

Discipleship according to the Bible looks very different than the model of Christian education currently being employed in most congregations today. A program model dependent on passive learning only addresses one part of discipleship and therefore cannot make true disciples of Jesus. Nor does a program model of Christian education reflect the Biblical image of discipleship. How we live as disciples impacts how we worship, fellowship, and share together in God's mission of redemption in our communities. Mission is the story of God's redemption in the world. A Biblical understanding of discipleship is about followers of Jesus participating in the mission of God in the form of community, worship, and evangelism. Discipleship from a Biblical perspective encompasses the whole of a person where believers are image bearers of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

As has already been discussed at length, the problems facing Christianity in America, specifically the declining percentage of people identifying with the Christian faith, are concerning. Ultimately the issues such as declining worship attendance, lower membership, and lackluster mission programs stem from a lack of true discipleship. If a church struggles to make disciples it will most likely struggle to develop leaders and culture shapers. All of these things are intertwined with one another.

Countless books and authors have taken note of the impact concerning failures of American Christianity to make disciples of Jesus. These authors are attempting to mold the conversation about how the local church can change course. The way forward should challenge Christians, and their churches, to think differently about what discipleship looks like. By focusing on a new way of discipleship beyond the passive learning model of Christian education, congregations will likely begin to experience transformation at every level. The health of a church's worship, mission, and evangelism is directly tied to discipleship.

Institutions, the Church, and a New Movement

According to Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, in *The Permanent Revolution*, what is happening in the American Church is an opportunity.¹ If Christians lose a sense of the revolution that Jesus brought to Israel in the first century, which was a movement of discipleship, they lose a vision for their ministry: "Seeing things from God's perspective is what lies at the heart of what it means to have a biblical perspective, and certainly it

¹ Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 832-833, Kindle.

matters when it comes to thinking about the church, its mission, its leadership, and its intended impact.”² In order to bring about the transformation needed today, the whole world should be seen through the whole of Scripture. This is the call for every church, in every century, in every part of the world. This is also the premise behind Christopher Wright’s book, *The Mission of God’s People*. “The mission of God’s people has to start and finish with commitment to the God whose mission we are called to share.”³ The mission of the church is not about the church, but the God who ordains it.

Hirsch and Catchim maintain that Christians today often fail to take into account the entirety of Scripture in terms of their ministries, specifically ignoring the role of Ephesians 4:1-16. According to this Biblical text, (specifically 4:11 “so Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers”) there are five offices that are necessary for impactful ministry which they refer to as APEST. However, most churches operate in a model made of only shepherds (pastors) and teachers. This system may have worked in the institutionalized church during the Christendom era, though that can be debated. However, it is not meeting the needs or challenges of today’s culture or church.

Hirsch and Catchim do not look favorably upon church institutions, although they do not totally discredit their role. The goal of most institutions is to survive, causing them to protect the center. The paradigm brings about a recycling of old ideas into a new context. It is like fitting a square peg into a round hole, “When the context shifts significantly, algorithms (or paradigms) can become problematic because they can

² Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 700-703, Kindle.

³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010), Locations 311-312, Kindle.

prevent an organization from readily seeing its way beyond them.”⁴ When a movement becomes an institution, it becomes insular and bureaucratic. This results in a top down ministry that inadvertently suppresses new ideas and new movements, leading to a decline in ministry without a vision for the future. They argue that what is needed is a new movement to reinvigorate the core. While this may be the case, Hirsch and Catchim believe that new movements are usually rejected by the center of the institution because they are a threat to the paradigm.⁵ Tim Keller in the book *Center Church* is not as harsh on institutions as Hirsch and Catchim. However, he does believe that it is more difficult to start new movements within them. He writes, “Institutions by their very nature are structured for long-term durability and stability and are prone to resist risky new ideas.”⁶

In their book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, paint wonderful imagery about the current structure of institutionalized churches in America. In summary, if the church desires to grow like a vine, it must have a trellis to grow around. A trellis without the growth of a vine is simply decoration. It serves no purpose other than the fact it may look good. The framework of the trellis (the institution) is needed so that the vine has space to grow. The problem arises when church members focus more on the trellis than the vine. They write, “Just as some sort of framework is needed to help a vine grow, so Christian ministries also need some structure and support.”⁷ Institutions are often necessary because new movements of growth, primarily disciple making, need support in order to grow.

⁴ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 783, Kindle.

⁵ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 773, Kindle.

⁶ Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Location 9883-9884.

⁷ Tony Payne and Colin Marshall, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Kingsford, AU: Matthias Media, 2009), 61, Kindle.

Keller argues that it is from these new movements that the center of the institution can be reenergized and refocused.⁸ In a way this how the trellis can be rebuilt and maintained, while at the same time sustaining a structure for growth. Difficulties arise when the trellis becomes more important than the vine. In a similar way to *The Permanent Revolution*, Payne and Marshall write,

The pastor keeps working away manfully, feeling overworked, under-appreciated and a little discouraged that his faithful vine work each Sunday doesn't seem to bear much fruit. In fact, he often feels he would like to do more to help and encourage others to be involved in vine work, the work of watering and planting and helping people to grow in Christ. But the sad truth is that most of the trellis work also seems to fall to him to organize—rosters, property and building issues, committees, finances, budgets, overseeing the church office, planning and running events. There's just no time.⁹

Based on Marshall and Payne's book, if pastors are only seen as keepers of the property and employees of the church, it will be difficult to understand them as disciple makers participating in the growth of God's kingdom on earth. This model may keep the wheels of the institution running, but it will struggle in discipleship.

Payne and Marshall think that the reason many churches move from vine work to trellis work is that first, vine work is hard. Second, trellis work is more impressive.¹⁰ The concentration on trellis work that is often so common derives from an institutional view of Christian ministry.¹¹ So instead of being focused on disciple making the church pours its energy into new buildings, programs and staff. This can typically result in higher budgets and more programs. However, it should be questioned whether or not trellis work is making disciples.

⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 10447, Kindle.

⁹ Payne and Marshall, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 70-74, Kindle.

¹⁰ Payne and Marshall, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 74, Kindle.

¹¹ Payne and Marshall, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 81, Kindle.

Focusing more on programs than people can cause a loss of vision when it comes to following the Great Commission. The problem is not necessarily institutions. Keller actually believes, in agreement with Payne and Marshall, but contrary to Hirsch and Catchim, that institutions serve a great purpose. He maintains that from the beginning the church was both a movement and an institution.¹² Balance between the two is necessary within the life of a congregation. The institution of the church should not be completely dismantled or understood to be something without purpose. Jesus clearly states to Peter in Matthew 16:18 that he will build his church. Even though Hirsch and Catchim appear to be anti-institutional, they propose that structure, or as Payne and Marshall would call it the trellis, matters when establishing a movement.¹³

Ultimately, creating structure will create a form for an institution. Hirsch and Catchim are correct in their critiques that established institutions have a tendency to stifle new movements. However, institutions are not entirely bad. Keller agrees that institutions have a tendency to suppress new movements. However, those institutions that suppress new ideas simply need to be challenged to take risks and a new movement can do that. Institutions without movements are like patients on life support, they lack vision and energy for ministry.¹⁴ According to Keller, institutional renewal can be accomplished with new movements and competition both inside and outside of the establishment.

A new movement of disciple making is not only needed, but necessary in a post Christendom era. It is no longer safe to assume that people are Christians or that they even believe in God. This helps the church reevaluate its mission and vision to be a disciple making culture. The trellis is important, but congregations should not lose sight

¹² Keller, *Center Church*, 9988-9989, Kindle.

¹³ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 6242, Kindle.

¹⁴ Keller, *Center Church*, 9803, Kindle.

of the vine or the work it takes for the vine to grow. A trellis can be built and left alone for years. A vine needs more attention. It needs to be fed, pruned, and trimmed. If the institution of the church is to continue, the goal must not be to make church members, but to make disciples of Jesus.

Pastors as Disciple-Makers

One of the problems facing a disciple making culture is the idea that professional clergy are trained to maintain the institution, and not trained to be disciple makers. In *The Permanent Revolution*, Hirsch and Catchim argue, “The clergy-laity dichotomy is one of the principal obstacles to the church effectively being God’s agent of the Kingdom today because it creates a false idea that only “holy men,” namely, ordained ministers, are really qualified and responsible for leadership and significant ministry.”¹⁵ How can members of the church be disciple makers if the work of the church falls only on the staff? Just as Payne and Marshall stated above, the members of the church pay the professionals to do the work. This results in a structure in which disciples fail to take ownership of the ministry Jesus ordained.

In this model a church can begin to look more like a social club where people gather rather than the body of Christ participating in the mission of God. When this is the case, congregations expect pastors to maintain the social club instead of being disciple makers. This is an issue addressed by Paul David Tripp in his book, *A Dangerous Calling*. Because churches rely on the seminaries to train pastors, one should ask how this is being accomplished and what pastors are being trained for. In many cases Tripp thinks that most institutionalized seminaries are separating the mind from the heart and are

¹⁵ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 2679, Kindle.

failing miserably in equipping pastors.¹⁶ One of the roles of pastors is to point people to the gospel in their life. As written in *Transformational Discipleship*, “Leaders must view discipleship through the lens of the gospel and help their people constantly preach the gospel to themselves.”¹⁷ Pastors equipped with knowledge, but lacking in discipleship, will probably not be effective in helping others become disciple makers.

Part of the problem is that many pastors today have been trained for a church that no longer exists in a culture that has shifted rapidly in the last two decades. The church does not need maintainers, which is how many pastors have been trained. It needs disciple makers. Similar to Payne and Marshall, Mike Breen writes,

The problem is that most of us have been educated and trained to build, serve and lead the organization of the church. Most of us have actually never been trained to make disciples. Seminary degrees, church classes and training seminars teach us to grow our volunteer base, form system and organizational structures or preach sermons on Sunday mornings and assimilate newcomers from the Sunday service.¹⁸

In this model of church, pastors can become more concerned about keeping the system running rather than making disciples wholly committed to Jesus. This goes against the design Jesus shows in Scripture.

Tripp believes that the definition of ministry readiness needs to be reworked. Simply thinking that the educated are ready to lead the people of God is a mistake.¹⁹ This system gives clergy a false sense that they have somehow arrived, only to run into brick walls when first stepping into the church. A congregation often expects the pastor to be fully competent in all things. According to Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck in their book

¹⁶ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 52, Kindle Edition.

¹⁷ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Phillip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 67, Kindle.

¹⁸ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011), 78-81, Kindle.

¹⁹ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 64, Kindle.

Designed to Lead, this is part of the problem. “For a pastor, or the people in a church, to view a pastor as omni-competent is to insult the body of Christ. ‘The body is not one part but many’ (1 Cor. 12: 14). All of God’s people are part of the body of Christ with an important function, an important role.”²⁰ Pastors are not the only disciple makers in the life of a congregation.

Hirsch and Catchim think it is important to break away from this pastor centered model in the western church in order to experience real transformation. They refer to this as the Shepherd/Teacher model for ministry. They argue,

If pastoral approaches alone could resolve the issue of the church, we should have gotten it after thousands of years of pastoral ministry. Patently it is not enough: people are still hurting, we lack discipleship, the church is in long-term decline, many are bored, and most churchgoers complain that they do not get enough “feeding.” There is not a preaching series or counseling program in existence that will fix these.²¹

For them the members of a church have to look beyond a professional laity to solve the institutional and disciple making problems.

The church that Jesus ordained is about community, and in community relationships are necessary. As the authors of *Transformational Discipleship* state, “The triune God is a community of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God who exists in community designed His followers to live in community for their maturity and to reflect His character.”²² In a pastor driven context discipleship is not impossible, but it is very difficult. True discipleship is the result of community that reflects the image of God to others. According to many of the authors above a new movement of discipleship

²⁰ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 594-596, Kindle.

²¹ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 7211, Kindle.

²² Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 162, Kindle.

within the Christian church should abandon a pastor centric model. Pastors play a vital role in the work of the church, but they should first be seen as disciple makers instead of CEO's of the body.

The Impact of Discipleship on the Church

Jesus ordained the church and chose it as his instrument to reach the world. This is vitally important when it comes to understanding discipleship because it is the mission of the local church. Peter Greer and Chris Horst contend in *Mission Drift*,

In God's wisdom, the local church is God's Plan A. There is no Plan B. His work continues through His chosen instrument. With a supernatural origination and divine mandate, the church is Christ's hands and feet bringing the Good News as we love God and our neighbors. The church is Christ in the world; Christ's bride really makes Him present, at this time, in this place, among these people.²³

In this working definition of the church, discipleship becomes the primary function in which these things take place. In similar fashion, Mark Dever writes in his book, *Discipling*, "Churches fulfill the Great Commission, and discipling is the work of churches."²⁴ However, the question must be asked if Christians in America today believe this is the reason the church exists. This is a question many contemporary authors are currently raising and there is rich literature concerning it. This is important for this new age of the Christian movement in America.

According to Hirsch and Catchim, by forming an APEST ministry, we are fulfilling all that Jesus intended for his church and specifically his revolution.²⁵ However, an APEST ministry is only possible when real discipleship is taking place. It is not about new mission strategies or radical thinking. The very nature of the church is mission

²³ Greer and Horst, *Mission Drift*, 171, Kindle.

²⁴ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 19, Kindle.

²⁵ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 7275-7276, Kindle.

rooted in discipleship. As Hirsch and Catchim write, “Our task as his people is to discern what God is doing and join with him. It is not so much that the church has a mission but that the mission has a church.”²⁶ Therefore, it is movements of mission, grounded in discipleship, that fuel change and institutional renewal, not the other way around. Wright says, “Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God’s mission.”²⁷ It is by God’s design that we have the church today and the command to make disciples.

What does it mean to say that the church was made for mission? Building on the Great Commission, God’s mission for his people is not to build churches, but to make disciples. Mike Breen writes, “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.”²⁸ For Breen, Jesus built the church through discipleship.

A missional church is a disciple making church. This is a point of many contemporary authors concerning mission and discipleship. A church, and specifically members of a church, cannot be missional without first being disciples. In *The Road to Missional* Michael Frost writes, “Whenever we assume church attendance is the chief end of mission, we will find ourselves reducing evangelism to recruitment and mission to salesmanship with all its attendant abuses.”²⁹ Jesus never tricked people into faith; he invited them into a relationship.

If mission and evangelism is focused on church growth and budgets, not on disciple making, the mission of God has been replaced with something else. What is

²⁶ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 4359, Kindle.

²⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 156-157, Kindle.

²⁸ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 84-85, Kindle.

²⁹ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional, Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 1054-1055, Kindle.

measured usually tells the story about what is important. Greer and Horst argue, “Measuring the wrong things can just as easily lead an organization off mission.”³⁰ A missional strategy for a local church that fails to be grounded in disciple making will not have the intended missional impact or breed transformation. Breen, in agreement with the authors of *Mission Drift*, believes,

Effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way around. We need to understand the church as the effect of discipleship and not the cause. If you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide.³¹

Recruitment to the brand is not what Jesus sent his disciples to do. In a consumer driven culture, this may be the easier missional strategy, but it is not the one Jesus gave to his followers.

It can be concluded that the church is the mission of God only when a proper understanding of what the church was designed to be and what mission is truly about is held. Hirsch and Catchim contend that the church was designed for impact.³² While a local congregation can be a place of safety, a way to escape from the stress of the world, that is not its purpose. As stated in *The Permanent Revolution*, “Contrary to many of the images of church as a defensive fortress suffering the relentless onslaughts of the enemy, the movement that Jesus set in motion is designed to be an advancing, untamed, and untamable revolutionary force created to transform the world.”³³ The church should function as a place of refuge in which people are fed and sent out to continue the kind of impact Jesus intended his movement to make in the world.

³⁰ Greer and Horst, *Mission Drift*, 126, Kindle.

³¹ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 92-95, Kindle.

³² Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 6287, Kindle.

³³ Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 6287, Kindle.

As the culture in the United States continues to move away from the structures and institutions of the Christendom era, many Christians are faced with competing values between the secular world and the life of faith. This should have a profound impact on a Christian's understanding of mission. Keller, Hirsch, Catchim, Breen, and many authors contend that mission actually flows through discipleship. Mission is not a compartmentalized part of the church meant to be accomplished through a few committees. It is the work of the church and the outcome of discipleship.

In order to accomplish discipleship as mission Christians should see the whole Scripture, for the whole person, for the whole creation.³⁴ According to Christopher Wright, "Clearly, not everything is cross-cultural evangelistic mission, but everything a Christian church is, says and does should be missional in its conscious participation in the mission of God in God's world."³⁵ The mission of God does not begin with the fall and end with eternal life; it begins with creation and ends with God's new Creation.³⁶ Mission is the story of God's redemption in history, the present, and the future. He completes this mission through disciples of Jesus Christ. Breen claims that the real issue is not a failed understanding of mission, but a failure to make disciples, "The problem is that we don't have a "missional" problem or a leadership problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem."³⁷ It appears as though many Christians have lost a sense of God's core mission given through Jesus in the Great Commission, to make disciples.

Trying to solve the problem of evangelism, mission, vision, or leadership without discipleship is like trying to fix a leaking pool with a Band-Aid. The outcome of true

³⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 192-194, Kindle.

³⁵ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 193-195, Kindle.

³⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 63-64, Kindle.

³⁷ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 97-98, Kindle.

disciple making is mission. As Breen writes, “If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission. Always. You see, somewhere along the way we started separating being “missional” from being a disciple, as if somehow the two could be separated.”³⁸ A biblical model of discipleship should have far reaching impacts on the life of a congregation. Mission becomes reinvigorated, not as an aspect of church, but as the life of the church. Leadership is strengthened and vision is built on the kingdom of God.

Discipleship is what disciples do and it happens in community. As Leslie Newbigin once wrote, “The best hermeneutic of the Gospel is a community of men and women who believe it and live by it.”³⁹ Mission and discipleship go hand in hand and it happens when Christians come together. Francis Chan would agree when he writes in his book, *Multiply*,

The church is a group of redeemed people that live and serve together in such a way that their lives and communities are transformed. What matters is your interaction with the people God has placed in your life. If you are not connected with other Christians, serving and being served, challenging and being challenged, then you are not living as He desires, and the church is not functioning as He intended.⁴⁰

This is how disciples are made, living together in common union, and bearing witness to how the Holy Spirit is working in and through God’s people. Transformation is the work of Christ through those who are committed to his work in the world.

Participating in God’s Story

How people are disciplined in Christ affects how they see the world. It is easy for Christians to point fingers at the culture and blame it for all the problems in the world.

³⁸ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 98-101, Kindle.

³⁹ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 586-588, Kindle.

⁴⁰ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (CO Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 52-53, Kindle.

However, the world is not the enemy. The world is to be loved, because God so loved the world (John 3:16). As Christopher Wright states,

If a house gets dark at night, it's no use blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is: Where is the light? If society becomes more corrupt and dark, it's no use blaming society. That's what fallen human nature does, left unchecked and unchallenged. The question to ask is: Where are the Christians? Where are the saints who will actually live as saints – God's different people, God's counterculture – in the public square?⁴¹

It is not the culture's fault for acting like a secular culture. That's what should be expected. The question that Christians should be asking is where are the disciple makers making disciples?

Discipleship is about equipping the church to live missionally in the world.

Therefore, discipleship is not an activity, but a way of life. As Wright suggests, this means that instead of the church simply being a place that “meets my needs, feeds my soul, teaches my children about God, and gives me a place to rest and relax” it should be viewed as a place that “equips me to live out my faith each day.”⁴² Instead of faith being another compartmentalized aspect of life, it encompasses the whole of the person. Dever agrees, “God wants you to be in churches not merely so that your needs are met, but so that you will be equipped and encouraged to care for others.”⁴³

David Bosch, who is quoted by both Wright and Frost, claims, “Mission is more and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is the alerting people to the universal reign of God through Christ.”⁴⁴ They argue that God's concern is not just for a

⁴¹ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 4507-4510, Kindle.

⁴² Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 5206, Kindle.

⁴³ Dever, *Discipling*, 20, Kindle.

⁴⁴ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 275-276, Kindle.

personal salvation from eternal damnation, but redemption for all of creation.⁴⁵ The way that redemptive work happens is through discipleship. It is disciples who are alerting people to the in breaking of God into this world. It is disciples who bear witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in communities.

People need to see what the kingdom of God looks like and they see it through how disciples live. What makes Christianity attractive is that something is different about Christians which sets them apart from secular culture. Frost says that if the missional church does its job well, people will see what it does and say, “I want to see the world they come from.”⁴⁶ When God’s people fail to live differently than the world in which they serve, the universal reign of God goes unnoticed. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation believe, similar to Frost, that, “Transformational discipleship occurs when people are impressed with the attractiveness of Christ and confronted with the deficiency of lesser gods.”⁴⁷ In order to be an effective missional movement people must realize that Christ dwells within his disciples. This is what Rodney Stark contends concerning the spread of Christianity in the early church in his book *The Triumph of Christianity*. Christians looked, acted, and served in a counter cultural way. Their impact on the lives of people was effective in showing people what the Kingdom of God looks like.⁴⁸ The church today could learn something from these early movements of Christianity.

Disciple making is about sending people out into the world in order to alert people to the presence of God. As God sent the Son, the Son sends the disciples. As JR Woodward maintains,

⁴⁵ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 276-277, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 383, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 48, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011), 422, Kindle.

Apostles are sent by God to help create a discipleship ethos and to call people to participate in the advancement of God's kingdom. Apostles seek to help people understand and live out their calling as sent people in the world for the sake of the world. They make disciples, who in turn make other disciples, who multiply ministries that bless the world.⁴⁹

Discipleship is about advancing the kingdom of God in the world. Frost would agree when he wrote, "Missional churches see themselves not so much sending, as being sent. A missional congregation lets God's mission permeate."⁵⁰ The redemptive work of Jesus, which is setting things right in a broken world, is done by disciples participating in God's story.

The world is changing rapidly and Christians should adapt to the changing culture in way that speaks of the glory of God. Everyone has a story. One thing that is required of a discipling church is to tell the story of God's redemption, relating God's story to the story of people's lives. Jerry Sittser deals with this issue in his book, *A Grace Revealed*. He writes, "God wants to restore us to a right relationship with him and to remake us according to the image of Jesus Christ, which will ultimately lead to the renewal of the whole world."⁵¹ God's primary concern is about total redemption of creation and not just personal salvation. By tapping into people's story they can be alerted to the presence of God in the world. Keller says that the message of redemption and the reason the gospel exists "is not about something we do but about what has been done for us, and yet the gospel results in a whole new way of life."⁵² This whole new way of life tells God's larger story and invites others to participate in it.⁵³ Discipleship, and by extension

⁴⁹ JR Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 126, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 553-555, Kindle.

⁵¹ Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Revealed: How God Redeems the Story of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2012), 63-65, Kindle.

⁵² Keller, *Center Church*, 547-548, Kindle.

⁵³ Sittser, *A Grace Revealed*, 2542, Kindle.

mission, is not complicated. It is simply participating in God's story and inviting others to do the same.

Therefore, "leaders must encourage their people as a means of discipleship to be actively involved in bringing the kingdom of God to bear on earth. What we'll find, then, is that God is indeed at work in us as much as He is at work through us."⁵⁴ Discipleship is the lens in which the in breaking of God into people lives and the lives of others can be witnessed. Jesus ushered in the reign of God on earth and disciples are people who participate in his reign. True discipleship imitates Jesus' efforts in bearing witness to the universal reign of God on earth.

There was an age and an era where the church enjoyed the respect of the culture, for the most part. That is not the case today, however, and it is one of the major hurdles that needs to be jumped in order to show people what this Jesus movement is really about. According to Don Everts and Doug Shaupp, in their book, *I Once Was Lost*, for most people in today's culture "religion is suspect, church is weird, and Christians are hypocrites. Distrust has become the norm."⁵⁵ The end of Christendom should be seen as an opportunity to engage the culture and the world in new ways.

Everts and Shaupp share five observations about how people in the post-modern era are becoming disciples. First, they have to trust a Christian. Second, a curiosity about the faith becomes evident. This is followed by an openness to change. Once this movement takes place, many, but not all, will start to seek after God. Finally, converts enter the kingdom and learn to live in the kingdom. This is a list very similar to the idea that Keller also observes in his ministry. First, people become aware or see what

⁵⁴ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 198, Kindle.

⁵⁵ Don Everts and Doug Shaupp, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught us About Their Path to Jesus*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 243-244, Kindle.

Christianity really looks like (trust). They then move to see how it is relevant for their lives (curiosity and openness). Third, they begin to believe it is credible (seeking). Fourth, they try it out. Finally, they accept the faith (acceptance).⁵⁶ The walls and barriers begin to break down when Christians live out their faith in Christ in every aspect of life; work, home, neighborhood, and everywhere they go. In doing so people will begin to regain a sense of trust in Christians and be willing to hear the story of God.

A sent community is one that is dedicated to drawing people into God's larger story of redemption. Discipleship is not just learning about Jesus, but being sent by Jesus to help usher in the kingdom of God here on earth and participate in God's full redemption of creation. In a culture where individualization has become the primary mode of operation, storytelling becomes a very effective mode of evangelism and disciple making. This will not be easy and it will take a high degree of patience, but it is necessary. Disciples alert people to God's presence in their lives.

Being Transformed

It is important that discipleship, while resulting in a transformed life, is not about simple morality. The purpose of the gospel is not to make good people better. It is to bring the dead to life. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation write in *Transformational Discipleship*, "The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship is a transformed heart, transformed affections. When someone becomes a true disciple, Christ radically changes the person's appetite."⁵⁷ When someone becomes a disciple it is because they have been transformed. It is not because they have all the information or because they have changed their behavior. They have had an encounter with Jesus that results in a relationship with him.

⁵⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 8208, Kindle.

⁵⁷ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 29, Kindle.

Francis Chan argues that, “Following Jesus is not about diligently keeping a set of rules or conjuring up the moral fortitude to lead good lives. It’s about loving God and enjoying Him.”⁵⁸ The primary mode of discipleship is enjoying the presence of God, not behavior modification.

A thirst for knowledge about Jesus flows from encountering him. According to Geiger, Kelley, and Nation,

When transformation occurs, there is an increasing hunger for more information about Jesus and his Word. However, the primary focus of acquiring knowledge must be the ongoing renewal of the heart. When transformation occurs, behavior will follow. The focus must be the heart, or the behavior is self-manipulated and short-lived as opposed to flowing from the transformation offered by Christ.⁵⁹

Or as Mike Breen puts it, “Discipleship isn’t a random assortment of facts and propositions and behaviors, discipleship is something that is you to the core and is completely incarnated in you.”⁶⁰ The purpose of transformation is not to make better people with higher morality. The purpose of transformation is to make committed disciples of Jesus.

Mike Breen believes, “We have become so acculturated in our Cartesian, Western world that we believe knowing about something and knowing something are the same thing.”⁶¹ When faith and discipleship are approached this way it becomes easier to break it down into prescribing a set of rules to live by. Following a set of Christian principles does not mean that someone is Christian or a disciple. It’s simpler to know who is in and who is out this way. It has clear lines and a very clear distinction concerning morality, but this is not discipleship. Frost claims,

⁵⁸ Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 22, Kindle.

⁵⁹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 28, Kindle.

⁶⁰ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 344-345, Kindle.

⁶¹ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 338-339, Kindle.

Pietistic discipleship is easier to work out. The rules are clear and pietistic churches will brook no dissent. They don't drink, smoke, dance, or chew, or go with girls who do. But cruciformity—a fully engaged approach—takes some finessing. It's a matter of constant vigilance, practice, and yes, trial and error. Discipling people in a cruciform paradigm will look more like a trade apprenticeship and less like induction into the military.⁶²

A cruciform paradigm, as Frost suggests, is one that depends on relationships. This way of discipleship is messier than getting people to follow a set of prescribed rules.

Christians should deal with people's brokenness and sinfulness. However, they also get to live in the joy of Christ's grace.

Jesus changes people to reflect his image. It is not about legislating a religious moral code, but living in the image of God. Transformation is the key to discipleship which will result in a changed life. This takes time and requires grace. Changed behavior is not the goal. A changed heart is.

Multiply

How does a church within a local context implement a movement away from a passive education model of discipleship into one that impacts the whole life? Many congregations are conditioned to think that what is needed in order to make this movement is a new program. Jesus never instituted a program for his disciples to follow. Bill Robinson reminds us of how Jesus lived his life when he writes in his book, *Incarnate Leadership*, "Jesus never led from the mountain. He came down and walked with common, ordinary people. He surrounded himself with twelve close friends, and he lived with them openly."⁶³ Kevin Ford suggests that congregations have to look beyond the program as, "a "successful" church can offer outstanding programs and ministries, but

⁶² Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 1639, Kindle.

⁶³ Bill Robinson, *Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 56, Kindle.

if its members are not being transformed, it is not a healthy church.”⁶⁴ Just putting together a new program will not ultimately result in the transformation desired.

Discipleship is about the culture of a local congregation. Mike Breen believes that God ushers his kingdom in through Christ by creating a discipling culture, “Jesus’ model for seeing heaven colliding into earth, for seeing the Kingdom of God advance in community, for seeing the world put to rights and people becoming Christians, was discipleship. Period. That was his whole deal.”⁶⁵ It is Jesus that sets the agenda and shows exactly what the mission of the church is really about and how it is to be accomplished. Chan thinks that Jesus was highly inviting, but at the same time deeply challenging to those who were willing to follow him. Transformation took place slowly as Jesus lived life with his disciples.

Jesus was not exclusive by living life with his disciples. Actually he was highly inviting. However, his relationships were deep, engaging, and intimate, which challenged his followers to live differently. Chan and Beuving argue, “The call to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is open to everyone, but we don’t get to write our own job description. If Jesus is Lord, then He sets the agenda. If Jesus Christ is Lord, then your life belongs to Him. He has a plan, agenda, and calling for you.”⁶⁶ Discipleship is about doing what Jesus did and living how Jesus lived. That includes how Christians live in community and discipleship with one another. It is a way of life. Similar to Chan, Breen thinks, “Jesus’ model of discipleship was life on life.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Kevin G. Ford. *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2007), 403-404, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 114-116, Kindle.

⁶⁶ Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 20-21, Kindle.

⁶⁷ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 492-494, Kindle.

Discipleship is a process not a program, as Ford claims, “The answer is not the model. The answer is the process.”⁶⁸ There is not a one size fits all program to make effective disciples in the church. Simply defined, discipleship according to Geiger, Kelley, and Nation is “following Jesus. It's fishing for people. And it's doing that in conjunction with others, in fellowship with others. Discipleship is simply helping someone find and follow Jesus.”⁶⁹ Along those same lines, Dever explains, “Discipling is initiating a relationship in which you teach, correct, model, and love. It takes great humility.”⁷⁰ Processes are slow and can often be filled with ups and downs. However, this is what Jesus did when he made disciples.

The foundation for community and for discipleship is found in the gospel. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation believe that, “The gospel is sufficient; it is enough. It is relevant. It is not merely the foundational curriculum for a disciple but the overarching curriculum.”⁷¹ This is not to say that Christians should focus only on the people who come to church. Jesus gave the church this model to focus on those people who do not know him. As Breen correctly states, “Disciple people. If you know how to actually make disciples, you'll reach people who don't know Jesus. Because that's simply what disciples do. That was Jesus' whole plan.”⁷² Jesus' model is life on life, disciple on disciple.

Jesus starts small by calling people to relationships. This was his plan for the restoration and redemption of the world. Relationships foster discipleship and discipleship multiplies. Robert Coleman expertly explains Jesus' model in his book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*,

⁶⁸ Ford, *Transforming Church*, 2022-2023, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 163-164, Kindle.

⁷⁰ Dever, *Discipling*, 36, Kindle.

⁷¹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 84, Kindle.

⁷² Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 101-103, Kindle.

It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow him. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men, whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be his method of winning the world to God.⁷³

It is amazingly simplistic and yet the outcome is amazingly effective. Jesus used people to reach the world with the good news.

By following Jesus' model for discipleship found in the gospels the church creates a culture of intimate relationships that challenges unhealthy behavior. Disciples invest in others. Breen goes even deeper and argues, "You can't be a disciple if you aren't willing to invest in and disciple others. That's simply the call of the Great Commission."⁷⁴ Chan and Beuving claim that, "making disciples is far more than a program. It is the mission of our lives. It defines us. A disciple is a disciple maker."⁷⁵ The model, or process, of discipleship in the Bible is about multiplication. Disciples make disciples. Geiger and Peck agree, "The full extent of discipleship is the development of disciples who are able to lead and develop others, not merely people who gather together for worship once a week."⁷⁶ Discipleship is not passive, but the active work of committed followers of Jesus.

If there is one continual theme among all of these authors about discipleship is that the design Jesus gives the church is one of multiplication. It's not about the church, but about the people who make up the church. The brilliance is in the simplicity. It does not take many resources or complicated programs to be a disciple making church. It requires people who are willing to invest in other people. Just as Geiger and Peck state in *Designed to Lead*, "The disciples Jesus developed bore fruit, fruit that lasts forever. Just

⁷³ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993), 21.

⁷⁴ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 503-504, Kindle.

⁷⁵ Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 31, Kindle.

⁷⁶ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 244-245, Kindle.

as Jesus disciplined them, they poured their lives into others, and followers of Christ have been multiplying ever since.”⁷⁷ It is not complicated. It simply involves effort and passion to see others enjoying the Kingdom of God. Any church, no matter the size or resources available can create a culture of disciple making.

JR Woodward provides a wonderful explanation of what this culture looks like. He claims,

In making disciples, apostles take an *orient, involve and equip* approach to training. They recognize that making disciples is a process, not a program, and it takes place within the context of engaging in God’s mission. Discipleship takes place when we are “with people,” like Jesus was with the Twelve, and it becomes personal and powerful in the informal daily rhythms of life. It’s about being vulnerable and being open about our brokenness, as Paul was with the Corinthians. Discipleship means inviting people to become whole again, which is partly about overcoming destructive habits, but also about building life-giving habits.⁷⁸

Ultimately, discipleship takes place one on one or in smaller groups, according to Woodward, “It involves ministering together, praying together and studying Scripture together. Disciples encourage, comfort and challenge one another. Discipleship takes place communally—in smaller groups as well as one-on-one.”⁷⁹ Eventually, as these groups grow and multiply other disciples they split to form new groups and new growth. This is a lifelong process. A disciple never fully arrives, but is continually seeking to grow in Christ and be an imitator of him. Discipleship is a never ending circle as Mike Breen believes, “The circle is a process, a way of living that does not have a specific beginning and ending. One does not become a disciple of Jesus and stand still;

⁷⁷ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 2359-2360, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 127-128, Kindle.

⁷⁹ Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 128, Kindle.

discipleship is a lifestyle of learning. And this learning begins with a change of heart.”⁸⁰
Discipleship never ends.

In a similar argument, Geiger, Kelley, and Nation state that there is no moving on from the gospel or a life of discipleship, “If people in our churches graduate from the gospel, they are not advancing to spiritual maturity but rather to lifeless religion, moralistic self-righteousness, or performance-based faith inaccurately called Christian.”⁸¹ That may sound harsh, but it is not the way Jesus established his church. Disciples make disciples and in doing so equip people for day to day life. According to Woodward, “Making disciples involves helping people live out their primary calling to follow Christ through their gifts and vocation”⁸² There are no short term fixes and disciples cannot be made over night. Argued by Geiger and Peck, “Discipleship is focused on the person for the long run, for fruit that will last.”⁸³ Disciples always have the long view in mind.

Jesus establishes his church for his work in the world. As Geiger and Peck state, “The means is discipleship.”⁸⁴ By focusing on a few, Jesus changed the world. The American church should try to recapture the concept of discipleship that Jesus first established his church. It is not a model of teacher student, but a relationship between Jesus and his followers. Discipleship is Jesus’ method and should be the church’s as well. It multiplies, grows, and reflects the image of God to the world. Discipleship is the means by which the mission of God is fulfilled.

⁸⁰ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 763-764, Kindle.

⁸¹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 70, Kindle.

⁸² Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 190, Kindle. In

⁸³ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 2409, Kindle.

⁸⁴ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 2421, Kindle.

Conclusion

Discipling the way Jesus did will not be easy. It requires a shift in focus from the many to the few, in order that the many may be reached. According to Dever, “Discipling is basic to Christianity. How much clearer could it be? We might not be his disciples if we are not laboring to make disciples.”⁸⁵ It is easier to focus on programs more than people, but that is not the model Jesus gives the church in the gospels. He invested his life in others and his followers should do the same. The outcome of this work affects the whole person with the whole gospel for the whole world.

JR Woodward sums this up beautifully,

The first telos of apostles is to create a discipleship ethos in the congregation so that God’s people live out their missional nature as followers of Christ. They look at discipleship holistically, beginning with those who have yet to self-identify as Christians and all across the continuum to those who are serving the community from the overflow of their walk with God. They seek to make disciples from the harvest for the harvest, recognizing that some of the most passionate disciples will come from those who have yet to become Christ followers: the people of peace that God connects us with as we live our mission day to day.⁸⁶

Ultimately, being the Church that Jesus said he would build will take a movement of people who understand their role as playing a part of God’s total redemption of the world, being a part of God’s story. What Jesus started was a movement that changes the world and he does it through discipleship. As Frost says, we need to stop driving through our neighborhoods to get to church, and start being the church in the community in order to alert them to the universal reign of God.⁸⁷ A new model of discipleship, based on what Jesus did in the Gospels, should usher in the transformation the local church needs.

⁸⁵ Dever, *Discipling*, 18, Kindle.

⁸⁶ Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 126-127, Kindle.

⁸⁷ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 2432, Kindle.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

Jesus had a vision for discipleship that centered on relationships, often within the context of small groups. In the gospels Jesus discipled his followers and then unleashes them to participate in his work in the world. This is what a Biblical model for discipleship looks like. It happens in small groups, intimate relationships, and reflective study. Disciples live life with other disciples. They share their worries, fears, and doubts. They encourage one another. Disciples grow together in faith, maturity, and spirituality.

In his book, *A Disciple Making Church*, Glenn McDonald asks his readers to think about what the ultimate work of the church is about. He writes, “It’s all about multiplying intentional imitators of Jesus Christ. That is the work that Jesus himself assigned to us.”¹ The theory is very simple, discipleship multiplies. Discipleship replicates itself. Therefore, discipleship should not be understood simply as a program that can be reproduced in church structure. Discipleship, in theory, multiplies in reproducible and intentional relationships with the purpose of following Jesus. How are these intentional, disciple making relationships fostered? What role can a congregation play in making this move from theory to reality?

Some churches have tried to address the discipleship issues through small group programs. The small group idea has the correct concept about how to get started. Small groups have a social component and are generally have small numbers that allow for relationships to develop. However, this project is designed to go deeper with a higher level of commitment and Biblical study than a typical small group. How Jesus interacts

¹ Glenn McDonald, *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality* (Lima, OH: FaithWalk Publishing, 2004), 239.

with his followers provides a model that can be replicated. While it is less plausible in today's culture to have 12 people follow someone around for three years, elements of Jesus' discipleship with the apostles can be applied to the way people are discipled in the modern church.

This process should impact the life of each follower of Jesus and have impact on the vitality of a local congregation in which disciples participate. It is a lifelong process. As Francis Chan reminds us, "The process never ends. This is how the church grows and continues to build itself up. This is the mission that Jesus left for us."² Discipleship is our mission and multiplication is the goal. It is how the church grows. It is how the mission of God continues. The design of this project is to test whether or not this is possible in the context of the local church.

The Design

As has already been stated, the congregation I currently serve as pastor, Meridian United Presbyterian Church in Butler, Pennsylvania, lacked discipleship, or at least intentional discipleship. We had hoped that reinvigorating our Sunday school program would bring about new disciples of Jesus. However, it did not work. First, most people failed to commit to coming to Sunday school at all. Second, those that came to classes did not result in any kind of measurable change in terms of faith development, commitment to the church, or increased mission involvement outside of the church.

These failed attempts at discipleship based on the education model from 2011-2013 caused us to evaluate what our vision should be for discipleship. Initially, I thought I should read more books about discipleship in order to gain a better understanding on

² Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (CO Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 3279, Kindle.

how to make Sunday school more effective and more attractive to the average church goer. The more I studied and reflected on our circumstances it dawned on me that we should be looking to Scripture to set the standard for us. What I found was Jesus teaching one on one and other intimate contexts with his disciples instead of preaching at them. Jesus never asked them to open their books and sit in their chairs as he taught them. He taught them and let them experience life with him. Then the disciples multiplied what Jesus did. If this is how Jesus approached discipleship with his followers maybe this is how our local church should approach discipleship.

In the fall of 2011 I began to research what this model of discipleship would look like in my local context. First, the group needed to be small, no more than 4 or 5 people. Second, the group needed to meet weekly. While it is impossible to get people to spend time with me every day, we needed to meet consistently together. Third, there should be a heavy focus on the study of the Bible accented by a few authors to help formulate this seemingly new concept of discipleship. This approach may be modeled on Jesus and the Bible, however, it is outside the box thinking for many who grew up in the Christendom era going to Sunday school.

The first resource for the project is a book by Greg Ogden called *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*. The book has 25 chapters that weave together Bible verses, devotions, and questions to be answered from the readings. Ogden separates these into 4 categories. Each chapter begins with a core truth. “The core truth serves as the nugget around which each lesson is built.”³ It is the focus for the chapter. Second is the memory verse. “When we commit the Bible to memory, God’s viewpoint

³ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 13.

on life slowly becomes ours.”⁴ Disciples should know God’s Word. It helps us grow closer to God and to encourage one another. Third is an inductive Bible study. “The object of the Bible study is to encounter reality and then through God’s power bring our lives in line with it.”⁵ This study causes us to wrestle with the text and how God is speaking to us today. Fourth is the reading, which Ogden describes; “This reading is intended to provide a contemporary discussion of the eternal core truth that will challenge our lifestyle and stimulate our thinking.”⁶ The reading helps illuminate the core truth.

This consistent structure guides the group through a weekly conversation meant to encourage, equip, and challenge one another. Each week, before getting to the book, the group should gather together in a spirit of prayer. Prayer is an intimate part of what it means to be disciples. Because part of discipleship is living life with one another each meeting should begin with prayer requests. What joys have you had in the previous week? How have you have seen God at work in your life? Where are you struggling in your life? What battles did you face this week? These are not meant to be vague requests, but honest conversations about real life. It is important the group understands that the conversations that happen are confidential as to open people up to being vulnerable.

Another positive of Ogden’s book is the Discipleship Covenant that each participant is encouraged to sign. In this promise each member of the group is making a commitment to the others. It helps with accountability and the concept of multiplying.

The covenant is as follows:

A Disciple’s Covenant

In order to grow toward maturity in Christ and complete Discipleship Essentials, I commit myself to the following standards:

⁴ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 13.

⁵ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 13.

⁶ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 13.

1. Complete all assignments on a weekly basis prior to my discipleship appointment in order to contribute fully.
2. Meet weekly with my discipleship partners for approximately one and one-half hours to dialogue over the content of the assignments.
3. Offer myself full to the Lord with anticipation that I am entering a time of accelerated transformation during this discipleship period.
4. Contribute to a climate of honest, trust and personal vulnerability in a spirit of mutual up building.
5. Give serious consideration to continuing the discipling chain by committing myself to invest in at least two other people for the year following the initial completion of Discipleship Essentials.

Sign _____ Date _____⁷

Setting the expectation from the beginning that this commitment comes along with an obligation to continue discipling others is inherent to the design of the project. The goal is to see discipleship multiply, mirroring how Jesus and his disciples worked in the gospels. Having this expectation at the beginning of the project sets the group member up to deeper study knowing that they will need to lead this study in the future.

The time commitment is an important piece of the design of the project. Each participant is asked to set aside at least an hour and a half per week for gathering and an hour and a half for study. Given that a number of chapters will take more than a week to get through and that some meetings times will be missed due to scheduling conflicts, the initial group commitment should take about one year. While the overall commitment for each participant is two years, one year being discipled and one year discipling others. Each member should be aware of the time commitment prior to starting the process.

The second aspect of the discipleship group focuses on two works by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*. While Bonhoeffer's works are not contemporary, the concepts and theology behind his work are very important for Christians today. He writes in the *Cost of Discipleship* that, "Discipleship is not an offer

⁷ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 14.

that man makes to Christ.”⁸ Discipleship is about what Christ does for his followers and through his followers. Discipleship is an offer made to us by Jesus. By reading through these classic Christians works the participants should gain a deeper understanding of what Christian community looks like and how disciples live together.

Discipleship consists of people dedicated to Jesus and to one another. The group is designed to foster these two things. Community is nurtured in love. It cannot be forced or simply a dream. As Bonhoeffer wrote, “The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.”⁹ The design of this project is to create a space for vulnerability, grace, and the love of Christ. Reading through Bonhoeffer’s works should challenge the participants to deeper relationships and more intimate community.

Accountability is vitally important for any disciple of Jesus. Bonhoeffer writes, “Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one’s community back from the path of sin.”¹⁰ According to Bonhoeffer, Christian community calls us back to God and out of our sin. The hope is that the small group model will help establish accountability and vulnerability grounded in the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

The design of this project is to be easily duplicated and easily replicated. The thesis states that discipleship multiplies through investment in the lives of others through our relationship with Jesus. The beauty of the design is in its simplicity. Discipleship is not meant to be complicated. It may be hard at times, but it is not complicated. Overall,

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gerhard Leibholz, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 58.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (London: SCM Press, 1954), 15.

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 100.

the design is meant for people to be in community with one another, study God's Word together, and invite other people to join in. As Eric Geiger reminds us, "By His design, we are not called to simply be image bearers, but to replicate other image bearers! We are not called to simply be His disciples, but also to make disciples."¹¹ The design of this project is meant to develop image bearers of Jesus who focus on doing that for others.

The Implementation Part I

In the fall of 2013 I began to pray about participants in this new project in the life of my congregation, Meridian United Presbyterian Church. I wanted to be very intentional about the invitations and not just open up a new program to the church. Personal invitations with very clear expectations were important to the project's success. An open invitation would have given the idea that this is a new 'program', something I wanted to avoid. Intentional invitations helped establish early expectations that this was something different. In January of 2014 three elders in my church agreed to participate in our discipleship group. They were aware that this was part of my thesis-project and that they were the initial test group. However, more importantly, all three understood the need for the church to approach our discipleship differently.

We met every Wednesday morning at from 6:00 AM to 7:30 AM at a local breakfast restaurant. The first half hour we would catch up about the previous week. We would share our concerns about life and really try to enjoy a time of fellowship. Sharing a meal together really had a positive impact on our group. Our meetings were more than a Bible study in a class room. We enjoyed each other's company and were able to go deeper into community with one another. While all three participants had gone to church

¹¹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 1130-1131, Kindle.

together for a long time, they did not really know each other outside of regular church activities. I found the fellowship to be a vitally important foundation for our study.

Following our time of fellowship we would enter into a time of prayer for one another. Each member was expected to share in the prayers of the other group members. Instead of just a quick prayer and then a study, each participant was expected to be in prayer for one another all week. This became even more appropriate and powerful when one member of the group was diagnosed with lung cancer in the middle of the year. While this caused the member to miss a number of meetings, he was cared for by the rest of the group. We went to the hospital to lay hands on him. We prayed with him and for him. While there is no way to know whether or not that would have happened prior to our small group, it was encouraging to see the group rally around a brother in Christ in his time of need.

Following prayer we moved on to our study in Ogden's book, *Discipleship Essentials*. While there are 25 lessons in Ogden's book, many of them took more than a week to finish in terms of discussion and execution. Factoring weeks for vacation, scheduling conflicts, and illness we met somewhere around 42 times throughout the course of the year. While I believed Bonhoeffer's books were important to the group, Ogden's material dominated most of the time. We never really got a chance to finish Bonhoeffer's works or discuss the books in general. Given that I felt they were important to the group I decided to use one of the days to highlight *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship* for the group as part of a normal weekly lesson. However, reading the books for the group study was removed from the replication expectations due to time constraints.

Throughout the first year we revisited our covenant with one another every three months. The primary objective of revisiting the covenant was to get the group members praying about who they would invite to participate in a year of discipleship following the conclusion of our time together. Our group met for one year and all three members finished the first year successfully, even the man diagnosed with lung cancer. We agreed to meet for breakfast every other month for the following year so I could help encourage them through leading their own discipleship groups.

The Implementation Part II

While year one went according to plan, for the most part, year two was more challenging. All three members were able to organize their own groups to lead. This was encouraging, as multiplication was the stated goal from the beginning. However, by our first follow up meeting two of the three groups had already disbanded. The leaders were rather disappointed. In both cases, upon completing the first chapter and reading the discipleship covenant, the participants did not want to commit to the amount of time necessary to fulfill the covenant.

This was a suspected possible outcome of the group. It should not be assumed that every participant will multiply or that every effort will bear fruit. It was important to continue to meet with the initial group, instead of me starting a second one, because they needed the encouragement along the way. Instead of focusing on the failure of their discipleship groups to continue, I encouraged them to think about what they learned and how they could apply it going forward. Just because one group did not work out, does not mean another will follow the same pattern. If they believed the discipleship process was effective for them and will be effective for others, they should try again.

While it took some time, both initial members of the group were able to start again with new people. At the time of this writing, in the fall of 2016, those groups have just begun, so it is impossible gather any data or conclusions about their success or failure at this point. What is encouraging is that neither person gave up trying to make disciples or invest in others with gospel. Failure can be formative if put to good use.

Of the three initial members of the small group only one finished the two year time frame on time by completing a year of leadership. This member, whom we will call Bob, started a discipleship group focused on couples. He invited his wife and two others couples to participate for one year. Every member of his group stayed engaged throughout the year. They broke for a period of 6 weeks in the middle of the year due to traveling, however, the group finished the material in a weekly home study.

One of the positives of Bob's group was that it involved three women in the church. The initial group was all men. That was not by design or on purpose, but simply how the group worked out. By leading a couple's small group, a number of women were able to get invested in this new model of discipleship. If the multiplying concept is implemented, more women will be invited into a life of discipleship having a greater effect on the life of the congregation.

While two of the three groups did not follow the timeline, the groups can still be measured as a success as long as they continue. Bob's group, while it did follow the timeline, at the time of this writing has only had one person continue with the study following the conclusion of their year. That is not to say more won't emerge from those disciples, but that they have yet to do so.

Metrics of Success

There are two ways to measure the success of the project. The first is to measure the numbers. If the goal is for the groups to multiply, then the number of groups and total number of participants gives an idea on how successful the multiplication has been. The numbers also give an indication of how successful the groups can be. It should be assumed that not every person who commits or participates in a discipleship group will finish. Even if each person does finish, it should be assumed that some will not continue with the leadership of another group. While that is the desired outcome, it is unreasonable to think that every person will complete it.

The hard numbers measuring how many have participated, how many groups of been formed, how many groups have been completed, and how many people have not completed will provide a strong indication on whether or not the project is effective and fruitful. The numbers will tell a story about the effectiveness of multiplication and the effectiveness of the study itself in forming disciples. However, numbers cannot tell the entire story. They are important to this project, but beyond the numbers are the hearts of those who are living life together, studying the Bible together, and sharing with one another.

The second metric will be much more difficult to measure. Outside of multiplying disciples, the point of the project is for participants to grow in their depth of faith. The thesis states that this process of discipleship should have an impact on each person's life in their relationships with Jesus, other Christians, and the community. A deeper level of discipleship should lead to more involvement in the mission of God, commitment to the

Body of Christ, and depth of faith. These are not things that can be measured quantitatively.

Therefore, I have developed a survey to be completed by everyone who agreed to participate over the last three years. This survey will take place in an online format. The people who will be invited to participate includes those who initially agreed, but ultimately decided to drop out or not complete the second year. There are a number of questions that can help formulate a measurement of success. For example: Did the discipleship process impact your life of faith? If so, how? Did you finish with your group, why or why not? Did you start a group in year two? If not, why?¹²

Given that the group started with just three people it should take anywhere between four to seven years to experience any measurable difference when it comes to participation in the mission of God. While few may start right away, the impact will be minimal until multiplication has time to take root. It is hoped that more leaders would be developed out of more discipleship. However, it takes time for this to be implemented and time to measure whether or not it is successful.

To be clear, this project is not about growth in terms of the number of people attending the church. While the discipleship groups are not limited to members of Meridian United Presbyterian Church and disciples are encouraged to include those from outside our congregation, the ultimate goal is to grow disciples who in turn become disciple-makers. The success or failure of the project is not dependent on church growth, but on the depth of spirituality and the reproduction of other disciples. Ultimately the measurement of success is reliant on whether or not people are imitating Christ in their day to day life.

¹² See appendix A for the complete survey.

Possible Outcomes

As is the case with any theory the outcomes can vary widely. If the project is successful in terms of multiplication and growth in faith it can have wide ranging effects on a local congregation. How people are discipled should impact how people lead, teach, fellowship, worship, and evangelize. Ultimately the goal of this project and a new approach to discipleship is to see people imitate Jesus in their lives and develop more and more into the image of Christ each day. If that outcome is achieved, the local church should experience transformation in multiple ways.

In any organization leadership is a key element in setting the tone for mission and vision, helping the organization to stay on course. This is no different in a local church. Geiger writes that the “church is designed to lead, designed to disciple leaders who are, by God’s grace, commanded to disciple people in all spheres of life.”¹³ Discipleship is the key to strong and effective leadership, not just in the church, but in the world as well. He continues, “The center of the Church is the gospel, but the center of leadership development must be the Church— meaning, that the leaders who will ultimately transform communities and change the world come from the Church.”¹⁴ A congregation focused on the gospel and making disciples should create leaders that have an impact on both the church and culture. This is one of the desired outcomes for my local context.

Second, an increase in discipleship should lead to higher levels of accountability and fellowship in a local context. This is not necessarily something that can be measured, but something that is experienced. Small groups with accountable relationships based on grace, love, and prayer should ultimately lead to better fellowship. This is what

¹³ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 222-223, Kindle.

¹⁴ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 254-255, Kindle.

discipleship does. It does not simply affect the mind but changes the heart. It happens in relationships. As McDonald writes, “From beginning to end, becoming like Jesus is fundamentally accomplished by being in the right relationships.”¹⁵ By participating in discipling relationships we are imitating Jesus and growing in love for one another. The right relationships are our relationship with Jesus and with other Christians.

Third, worship and mission should become more invigorated. Disciples worship and then are sent out into the world to do the work of Christ. When discipleship is multiplying new people are being exposed to the person and work of Jesus. Discipleship is intimately tied to how someone worships and how someone serves others in Christ’s name. Therefore, evangelism is the outcome of disciples who are dedicated to making disciples. They tell the story of God in the world.

While all of these seem like lofty goals for the project, they are possible outcomes for a church whose focus is more on discipleship than the institution of the church itself. Not all of these things will be achieved in the highest degree. However, all of these outcomes could help move the church forward in reflecting the light of Christ to the world.

Conclusion

It would be too high of an expectation to think that discipleship is the silver bullet to all of the issues a local congregation may face. However, discipleship based on Jesus’ life and actions in the Bible should have a positive impact on transforming the local church with a long term approach and vision. The mission of a church should not be to grow the church, but to grow disciples who grow other disciples. The ultimate result of

¹⁵ McDonald, *The Disciple Making Church*, 208.

making disciples is growth both spiritually and numerically within the life of a congregation.

This growth cannot happen simply by running a replicable program, but through replicable relationships focused on the Gospel. Programs, defined as something that has a specific plan or code, are not inherently bad. However, they often lack a relational aspect. Programs are generally the outcome of a group of disciples looking to engage in the life of the mind. Small groups focused on intentional relationships that foster discipleship should be far more effective.

It is important to note that not every person who attends church will want to participate in such a group. This is not to say that they are less faithful or less dedicated to Jesus. Not everyone who attends my local church will join a discipleship group, just as not everyone who does will lead one of their own. My goal is to reach about 50% of the church with this discipleship model. That is probably an aggressive number, but I believe it to be attainable.

Following the two year commitment the members will need to think about what it means to continue in a life of discipleship and what kind of small group ministry would be effective. Small groups should grow over time. It is important that they do not become stagnant or a clique. This outcome often makes the group more inwardly focused than anything else. People should always be invited to join and when the group gets too large, they should split. This is multiplication at work. Exclusive small groups are a hindrance to a multiplication model of discipleship. Exclusivity is counter to the gospel and will not result in disciple making.

While not everyone will participate and not every hoped for outcome will be achieved in the fullest extent, this new way of discipleship should have positive impacts on the life of Meridian United Presbyterian Church. The project has flaws and it will not be a continuous line of growth. However, it should, at least in theory, move the congregation forward in terms of spiritual growth, missional identity, and leadership vitality. The key to the entire project is whether or not disciples will multiply other disciples. This is what Jesus did, what his disciples did, and what Christians today should do. It is not the responsibility of the church, but of the people who make up the church. Making disciples is not easy, but it is the call given to all those who follow Jesus.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

The project testing the theory of multiplying discipleship began in January of 2014. At the time of this writing it has been almost three years since the project started. The results and outcomes to this point are a mixed bag of success, failure, and a little in between. In December of 2016 an anonymous survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey.com to gauge the participants' view of the project and the impacts it had on each of them personally. The survey was sent out to everyone who had participated or was invited to participate over the course of the last three years. This provided a wide range of responses pertaining to what was effective, what was not, and how things could be improved moving forward.

The design of the project is about half way through the stated six to seven year goal. Therefore, the data is incomplete at the moment. Given the time constraints of the project, I can only report on what has happened so far. The goal was to test whether a multiplication concept of discipleship modeled after Jesus' relationship with his followers found in the gospels is possible in the American Church today and whether or not it has any impact on the life of a congregation. While it has been moderately successful and has slowly multiplied, not everything has gone according to plan.

Current Status of the Project

Meridian United Presbyterian Church currently has three discipleship groups meeting a regularly. Of the original three participants, only one completed the year of leading within the initial two year time frame. As already stated in the last chapter, two of the original three disciples had started groups that failed within the first month of

launching. Both of those participants have put together a second group that just began meeting at the time of this writing in December of 2016.

In all there have been a total of 21 people participate or who are currently participating in a discipleship group. Meridian UPC has just over 300 active members and an average worship attendance of around 170 people per week. Measuring from the active membership, 7% of members in the church have participated in a discipleship group in some capacity. This does not include the people who dropped out in the first month. When factoring out the people who are members, but not actively engaged in the life of the congregation (some elderly who are homebound or people who are members but rarely participate in the life of the congregation) the level of participation is just under 10%.

By this stage in the model I had hoped to have somewhere between 15-20% participation from the congregation. While the projected goal has not been met at this point, 10% participation is extremely encouraging. Recognizing how different this model is from the normal mode of operation for Meridian, it is not surprising that the project has run into some resistance. The reasons for this resistance will be discussed later in this chapter. The initial goal was to see 50% of congregation participate. However, based on the current trends and the pace of multiplication it is more accurate to expect 20-25% participation at the completion of the project three to four years from now.

Overall, at this stage, I would say that the project's goal of multiplication has been moderately successful. A couple people have gone on to start their own discipleship groups. However, a majority of participants either dropped out in the first year or did not continue on to the second year of leading a group. This was an expected part of the

project as it cannot be assumed that there will be 100% success rate in terms of multiplication. I had hoped the number of drop outs would be lower than what it has been. To this point there have been eight people who initially agreed, but ultimately dropped out and did not complete year one. There have also been six people who completed year one, but did not continue into year two. Many of the reasons for the failures will be discussed in the survey analysis. The rest of the participants are currently in or just finishing year one. Therefore, it is difficult to gauge the rate of multiplication from that group at the moment.

Survey Analysis

A survey was sent to every person who had any contact with the project in any way. In trying to gather as much data as possible surveys were sent to people who were invited to participate but declined, people who agreed but ultimately dropped out, people who completed year one but not year two, and people who completed both years. The survey was conducted through an online tool called SurveyMonkey. Of the 21 surveys that were sent out, ten were completed.

When the participants were asked how often they attended Bible study, small group, or Christian education opportunities, five responded that they attend sometimes, three said they attend most of the time, and two said their attendance was infrequent or not at all. Based on the survey many of the people who participated in a discipleship covenant were people who were already active in Christian education. Eight of the responders participated in the discipleship covenant¹ and two said that they had agreed, but ultimately decided not to do it.

¹ Found in chapter four on pages 77-78.

Overall, for those who joined a group, they reported seeing growth in their faith, some more than others. Of the eight people who completed year one, only one person said that the group only had little impact on their faith, while four stated a moderated impact and three others stated a strong impact. Multiplying, which means becoming a disciple-maker, is the primary goal. However, faith development and spiritual growth are the two things that foster disciple-making. A discipling culture should, overtime, create a community where disciples become disciple-makers.

When asked whether or not the discipleship group challenged the participants view of discipleship, worship, or mission, three said “yes” and five said “somewhat”. Therefore, every person who participated at least through the first year had a positive experience in discipleship and the work of the church. When asked if they would recommend a discipleship group to someone else, seven out of the eight that completed year one said they were likely to do so and one said that it was somewhat likely. Finally, when asked if they would participate in another discipleship opportunity, those that completed at least year one responded that they were likely or very likely to do so in the future.²

The Challenges

Based on the survey and conversations with people who participated or ultimately chose not to do so, there were a number of reasons why some groups struggled. One of the major hurdles for people, specifically those who ultimately decided not to join, was time. One survey responder said, “Time was the major factor for me deciding not to do it.” Another responder wrote when it came to starting their own group, “To start with at least the first dozen people I asked didn't have time. Three came out for the first meeting,

² See full survey results in appendix B.

then didn't have time after that.” A third participant wrote on the survey response, “Many people I asked were willing in concept but we were never able to come to an agreeable time to meet. I thought the crack of dawn offered the most flexibility but some had long and rigid commutes. The evenings were always challenging. I was not available 4 evenings per week with other commitments.”

The time issue is difficult to address because in order to be a disciple you must be willing to spend time with other disciples in study, prayer, and mission. Physical presence “with Jesus” is an important aspect of discipleship. Participating in a discipleship covenant is time consuming and it should be. I don’t believe there is a way to lessen the time needed in order to complete the process effectively. The challenge is to get people to see that this is time well spent. If disciples are being formed and see it as valuable to their day to day life, they will be more willing to make the time for it.

The time commitment should not be avoided. It is important to be upfront about how much time is necessary when inviting people to participate. Disciples need to be committed, and setting the time aside to go through the process is important. However, when disciples experience change and growth through this new way they become the recruiters. If they think it is valuable, they will invite others to participate. In doing so, they create a naturally flowing feedback loop in which the invited hear about how this is time well spent. There will most likely always be people who just cannot or will not make the time commitment a priority. This should be anticipated for anyone looking start such a group.

A second challenge faced in this project was vision. As one survey responder who did not participate wrote, “I also believe that the program as structured would eventually

collapse under its own weight.” In theory this Biblical model is self-sustaining. The weight would never be too burdensome because it does not fall on one person or one committee to do all the work. This concept of discipleship simply multiplies itself, even though not every person will become a disciple-maker. The church may run out of people to disciple from within the walls of the building, but that’s the point. It should multiply outside.

Another issue concerning vision is that some people did not see the need for such a group and believed that Sunday school was a sufficient discipling tool. As one person I spoke with said, “Sunday school has worked so far, why change anything?” This person wanted us to put more time and energy into reinvigorating our already existing program. This is not surprising given the nature of the church I serve. How do you convince the morbidly obese person that a healthier diet is the key to a better life if they don’t see anything wrong? Or how do you convince a person with cancer that they are sick, even though they may not want to believe it? These analogies may sound extreme, but that is the intent. We have a discipleship problem. If it continues to go unnoticed or unaddressed, it will prove to be fatal.

Over time the proof should be in the changed lives of those who are willing to become disciples and by extension disciple-makers. If lives are changed and the church is changed, the evidence will be overwhelming that a new way forward is necessary. That does not mean everyone will engage. Just as we know the dangers and health risks of smoking, yet people still smoke, people may know the benefits of discipleship and still choose not to participate.

Sunday school is not working in our church and it has not for some time.

Considering that members believe that Sunday school has been effective, means that the problem of discipleship in the life of church goes beyond the model. There is a lack of definition between what a disciple looks like compared to an average church member. This leads to a lack of vision. The overwhelming majority of people at Meridian UPC have only known the passive model of Christian education as the norm of discipleship their entire lives. Therefore, part of the resistance is that this discipleship model challenges their inherited understanding of the church. Until there is evidence that intentional, relational and intimate discipleship is more effective, some people will not participate. The key here is to be patient with the process. Transformation in congregations is slow and will not happen immediately.

A third concern, which was raised by one respondent, was that the materials were not challenging enough. This person self-described as a mature Christian who had four people in their discipleship group. They wrote that, “just being in small group is beneficial however, there was too much repetition. It seemed to be beneficial to the individual who is a fairly new Christian. The other two not so much.” This person believes that the model is effective, but that the materials lacked depth. The participant said “I didn’t really learn anything new although it helped me refocus on a few important things.” Ultimately, they would recommend the study “for a seeker, new Christian, or someone looking for revitalization.”

Not every person will enter a discipleship group at the same level of spirituality. This is why programs can often be unproductive. It is difficult to formulate a model that will reach every person effectively. However, even though this person did not find the

material particularly challenging, they did believe the model was effective. This means that a review of the material for Christians who are more mature in their faith would probably be a good idea. I would suggest developing different entry points into this discipleship model. People relatively new to faith will have different discipleship needs than those who have been a part of the faith most of their lives.

Finally, and maybe the most challenging obstacle, has been the ability of third generation disciples to find other people who wanted or were willing to join a covenant group. These are the participants who completed year one under the discipleship of someone from the original group. As one person wrote on the survey, “We did not know who we would like to invite to a new group.” Another person said they would love to start a group, “But had difficulty getting people together and just decided not to continue.”

This is the place where this project looked more like a program than a true discipleship model. People were simply trying to fill slots for their group and had not really grasped the concept of discipleship multiplication. While the material was good for many of the participants, I’m not sure that one year is enough time for people to truly be formed into disciple-makers. Organic and intimate relationships cannot be forced or mass produced. It takes time. It is possible that one of the flaws of this project is the two year time frame. Jesus took three years to form and disciple the twelve and they lived life together. A once a week meeting for a year is probably not enough time to shape a disciple into a disciple-maker.

Every person who tried to start year two in leadership had people reject them. However, when I started the original group I did not have any rejections. I believe that

some people are more likely to participate if they are invited by the pastor rather than an average church member because it is assumed that only the pastor has the job of making disciples. It may also be that people are less likely to say no to a pastor than they are an average church member. Of course this is all speculation, but seems relatively likely. The pastor plays a vital role in casting the vision as well as encouraging people to participate. However, the pastor cannot be the sole point of disciple-making if the church seeks to have a disciple-making culture.

The move from disciple to disciple-maker has been more difficult than I anticipated. Some people just don't have the personality or drive to do it. That does not mean they don't value discipleship. However, it just has not worked for them. Having knowledge of disciple-making or the process in which to make disciples is not enough for some people to accomplish this task. It also means that maybe the process needs to take a much slower pace than the two year model used in this project. Ultimately, the struggle to find willing participants is not surprising. The first 10% are the early adopters. As more positive results are experienced, more people will most likely be willing to get involved.

What Worked

Not everything was negative. While the groups did not multiply as quickly as hoped for, they did multiply and that was the goal. Many people engaged a new form of discipleship that they found overall to be challenging and helpful in their journey of faith. Also, new relationships have been formed in the life of the church that should have long lasting impacts on the health of the church. There were many positive experiences reported from those who participated in this project.

First, all of the participants responded that the process of discipleship had a positive impact on their understanding of mission, worship, and discipleship. One of the stated goals of the project was to see how this discipleship model would affect the mission and vision of the local church. Reporting that everyone who joined a group saw a difference in their understanding of these three areas means that the project was moderately successful in achieving a desired outcome. It proves that by addressing discipleship effectively the church can experience growth and renewal in other areas of ministry.

Second, in what is the most impressive outcome of the discipleship groups, many new relationships were formed. A majority of the participants reported that while meeting weekly was challenging, new relationships were created. One participant wrote on the survey that even though it was time consuming they “appreciated the weekly accountability of participating in a group.” One of the keys to discipleship is developing intimate relationships that allow for vulnerability. This outcome typically happens during regular and frequent meetings. As one responder wrote about their group, “The participants were open and shared freely of their faith and how the Scripture affected them.” Another wrote, “I came to realize that the Holy Spirit can really unleash new dimensions to Scripture as a vulnerable discipleship group shares their different perspectives on a passage, theme or challenge question. Expressing the memory verse in your own words and reflecting on the reading reflections are very valuable exercises and come to better light with others sharing their own takes on the passage.”

The accountability of the group and vulnerability of sharing had a positive influence on other participants. For example, the original three disciples had interacted

with each other as church members prior to coming together for the first year of study. While they ‘knew’ each other, they did not really ‘know’ each other. One of the great successes of this process was the deep and lasting relationship between the three men. One of the members was diagnosed with lung cancer while we were still in the process. It was his discipleship group that walked with him through his treatment and recovery. After the cancer returned for a second time, it was the discipleship group that he called first for support and prayer as the diagnosis was being made. The depth and trust was formed over a year of being together as disciples. A program cannot accomplish the same level of community and commitment to one another as a discipleship covenant where relationships are formed and life is lived together. A program is something you attend. Discipleship is something you do.

Accountability, vulnerability, and community can only take place when one person trusts another. The groups seemed to foster these kinds of relationships. When these things occur it opens the door to growth. The time commitment all of the sudden does not seem as overwhelming because the relationships, community, and spiritual development that come from this process are more valuable. While this cannot be measured in a study or survey, from a pastoral perspective I have noticed a deeper and richer sense of community from those who have participated. They are more willing to engage in social events at the church. They also seem more likely to get involved in other things. All of this is the outcome of fostering community and relational discipleship.

Another positive aspect of the discipleship process was that many of the participants reported that regular interactions with the Bible, due to their discipleship group, helped them grow in their faith. A returned survey stated, “It is always

enlightening to hear how others view the Scriptures and how the Scriptures speak to them. It creates a deeper understanding of just how important and relevant the Bible is to our everyday lives.” Another participant wrote, “It did help me to be more conscientious about Bible reading and prayer every day.” Gaining a better knowledge of the Bible along with creating the habit of daily devotion is an important aspect of discipleship. In this respect the project achieved the desired outcome.

Finally, by trying to create a discipling culture we have seen positive development of new leaders, or for those already in leadership, stronger leaders. While many of the people who have participated up to this point have already been in positions of leadership, I have witnessed them become stronger leaders. They are more comfortable expressing their theology and beliefs in meetings. They also seem to be more confident in their role as leaders and decisions makers. Creating a discipling culture has helped to formulate new and stronger leaders in the church.

All of these positive returns are very valuable in the life of Meridian UPC. Even if the project ended today, I believe that the results that have been achieved up to this point have been worth the time and effort. While this process and project may have its flaws, it has worked on a number of levels in helping to form a disciple-making culture. It will take time to achieve all of the desired outcomes. However, so far there are many positive signs that are worth celebrating.

Project Conclusions

Overall the project has been moderately successful in terms of helping people grow deeper in their faith and multiplying new disciples. One of the biggest challenges is having people continue on in year two leading a group of their own. Also, most of the

people who have participated up to this point have been a part of a church for most of their lives and therefore, new disciples from a missional aspect, have not been formed. The church has been gaining new members recently who are relatively new to faith or returning to the church after a decade or more of being away from it. Given this, there should be opportunities to disciple new Christians in the near future.

One of the participants, who was more mature in their faith, felt that the material was rather remedial, while others believed that this was an add-on or elective when it came to church life. However, for new Christians they can begin to discover this process as part of the Christian life. The growth in the church should be viewed as an opportunity to help these people in faith formation without the obstruction of the “old” ways of discipleship or a view of how the church “should” work.

Multiplication has not taken place at the rate that I initially hoped for, but multiplication is still happening. This is a positive outcome. Given that around 10% of the active members of the church have experienced this new way of discipleship, a foundation has been created. There is no reason the congregation cannot build off of this model going forward. It will take some time, but it is certainly a good start. However, at this point, because of the challenges of getting people to follow through on year two, it’s hard to project how effective the multiplying aspect will be going forward.

Some of the major hurdles to multiplication are the rejection of the process, the entry point, and the time commitment. After a person has been turned down a few times by people they have invited to be a part of this discipleship model, many have just given up on the leadership aspect. This is where encouragement from the group and particularly the leader can play a pivotal role. Not every person invited into a relationship with Jesus

says “yes”. The early disciples and even the Apostle Paul experienced rejection throughout their ministries. This should be expected. The aim should be to help people deal with the rejection and continue in their life long process of being discipled and discipling others. Failure is a major formative experience in the life of a disciple. The group should anticipate it and learn how to use it effectively.

In 2017, as the pastor, I plan to start a second discipleship group to go along with the other three groups projected to be meeting. If everything goes according to plan there should be between 9-12 people looking to start a group in 2018. One of the issues that needs to be addressed is how to help people looking to start a discipleship group find others who might be interested. I plan to have people give personal testimonies in church explaining the benefits of participating in an effort to generate more interest in the process. We are also planning to use some of these leaders to launch a small group ministry based on the values and concepts of this discipleship project. These small groups will be more stable over time with the goal of multiplying them in the future. A key aspect to the small group ministry will be making sure that the groups are missional and focused on discipleship, with the intent of multiplying and engaging new people over a longer period of time instead of the two year model used for this project.

By focusing on a few, instead of the many, we appear to be reaching more people in the area of discipleship than previously were participating in our Sunday school or small group programs. This was a big part of the thesis which stated that by focusing on a few Jesus was able to reach the multitudes. In this regard the thesis has been proven to be true. Although, at this point, it is too difficult to prove whether or not this discipleship method has impacted the life of the church in other areas that had initially been

anticipated. While we have seen some positive growth in those areas, it cannot be concluded at this stage that this discipleship model has revitalized the church on every level.

On a positive note one member of a group has come on to our board of elders and two others have joined the board of deacons, although this may not be a direct outcome of participating in discipleship. There does appear to be an increase in activity around the church by those who have participated. This it is difficult to qualitatively prove at this point, but it appears as if it is going in the right direction. Looking forward we will start to measure the leadership development in the life of our congregation as the process continues.

Ultimately, I believe the project, despite some of its flaws and failures, to be on the right track in proving the thesis that a Biblical model of discipleship focused on how Jesus disciplined his followers is what the American church needs in order to see revitalized worship, mission, and evangelism today. While it cannot be determined conclusively at the moment, due to the limited time of this project, multiplication and discipleship based on intimate relationships and the study of Scripture is happening in a new form in my local context. This is having a positive and transformative outcome on the life of our congregation. This was the hoped for conclusion and it is encouraging that even though it may be taking root at a slower than desired pace, it is moving in the right direction.

For Further Consideration

If I had to start this project from scratch I would do most of it again. However, there are a few things I would do differently. First, for the purpose of the project, I

removed myself from discipleship leading in years two and three. I wanted to see if the groups would multiply without direct involvement from the pastor. I think this had negative impacts on the rate of multiplication and discipleship within the life of the congregation. If I had completed at least two more groups with three people in each one, based on the percentages and numbers above, there would most likely be two or three other groups meeting at the moment.

While the pastor's involvement has already been discussed, there are positive and negatives to this approach. The negatives include people who think only the pastor is responsible for disciple-making. This is not possible, nor is it sustainable. If only the pastor is responsible, then the disciples would never actually become disciple-makers, negating the entire thesis and the theory of multiplying discipleship. However, on the positive end more disciples mean more disciple-makers. If I had invested in more people over the last two years we may have experienced more discipleship opportunities. This is speculation, but highly plausible.

Secondly, while I have led the discipleship group, I have not formally entered into a discipling relationship where I am the one being disciplined. I think this is an important aspect of discipleship that was unintentionally overlooked in this project. While I have friends and mentors who offer me accountability, the discipling relationship is different and necessary if you are going to disciple others. I would suggest to any person considering this model to enter into a discipling relationship where they are being disciplined before starting with others, even if they run simultaneously.

Thirdly, I would consider having a follow up plan for when this particular model, based on Ogden's book, runs its course. While the goal is to create disciples who

multiply other disciples with lifelong discipleship habits, a two year commitment is not the end result. The multiplication of small groups may take longer than the stated two year commitment in this project. Having a plan on how to keep people connected beyond the book or this particular process should help to keep disciples grounded in those formative relationships, accountable in prayer, and continued Bible study. In particular, the person who completed both years of the discipleship commitment on time is not currently involved in any type of group or discipling process. This is a problem that should be accounted for.

Finally, this project may look like a program in some respects. That is not the intent. However, without careful and intentional attention to the relationships that should be formed and the study that should take place, some may think they have graduated from our discipleship program. Finishing the two year commitment does not mean that someone has completed the discipleship process. As been stated numerous times, discipleship is a life-long endeavor. It is important that this not be seen as an attempt at a replicable program, but rather an intentional relationship with the aim of growing together in the image of Jesus.

There appears to be some overlap in the concept of small groups and this discipleship process. I do not think they are mutually exclusive. Small groups help facilitate discipleship. However, this discipleship needs to be focused on creating disciple-makers and not just creating disciples, which small groups tend to do. In essence this project and discipling model takes the small group concept to the next level. Instead of simply growing in faith with a limited number of people, the participant is being formed into a disciple-maker. This project has proven that forming someone into a

disciple-maker is not an easy task. The shift that needs to occur in each disciple is an eventual realization that to be a disciple means to make disciples.

For Further Study

While there is a wide breath of material presented in this thesis, there are a number of good materials that could be used to further this study. The Verge Network has emerged as a major force in understanding the current cultural trends and how the Gospel speaks into it. They state on their website that they are:

An advocate and champion for movements of gospel-centered Missional Communities, Verge Network exists for church leaders, students, entrepreneurs, artists, urban innovators, business leaders, community development specialists, non-profit leaders, church planters and everyday leaders – anyone pursuing the mission of God, in community, whatever the context, for the sake of the Gospel. Verge leaders and churches are engaged in the mission of God, centered around the gospel, in community, and understand the value of staying current on issues surrounding the mission of God.³

Many of the authors used in this thesis are a part of The Verge Network and I would recommend it to any church or pastor looking for new ways to engage the world through discipleship and leadership development.

There are also a number of new books that have been written pertaining to this discipling topic. This is an emerging trend that many Christians are noticing in our culture and so there are sure to be more materials available as the data comes back concerning effectiveness. Alan Kreider recently published a book called, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*. Kreider takes a historical approach to the unlikely rise of Christianity in the first few centuries after the birth of Jesus. Through patience and prayer, not missional strategy, the church grew.

³ The Verge Network, <https://www.vergenetwork.org/about/> (accessed December 12, 2016).

Another book to consider is N.T. Wright's latest work, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*. This book is not exclusively about discipleship. However, Wright describes the movement that Jesus created and the impact it has on the mission, vision, and discipleship of his followers and his church. For Wright, the crucifixion is not just about absolving us of sin, but starting a revolutionary force that brings heaven and earth together. Disciples are how Jesus' revolution reaches the world.

Other books such as Kyle Idleman's *Not a Fan*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, and Jim Putman's *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples* are all quality resources for further study beyond the books and authors used to formulate this thesis. Finally, Greg Ogden has recently released another book called *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, building on his book *Discipleship Essentials* used in this project. For Ogden the solutions to our discipleship problem will not be found in large scale, finely tuned programs. Instead the solutions will be found through Jesus' method of investing in a few to reach the many.

Conclusion

The American church needs a new way forward when it comes to making disciples. The culture has changed. The world has changed. How disciples are made should also change. This change is not about becoming more like the culture, but speaking the gospel into the culture. Jesus never instituted a program for his followers to replicate. He entered their lives and discipled them. This is something American Christians need to emulate if they want to be effective disciple makers.

Jesus laid out a model for discipleship that focused on small groups, intimate relationships, and teaching the Scriptures. This is not complicated and does not need many resources in order to be accomplished. Every church should be in the business of making disciples no matter the theology, denomination, or size. This is the mission Jesus gave in the Great Commission. All it takes are followers of Jesus willing to invest in others. Every Christian and every church can and should be willing to do that.

Discipleship affects every aspect of Christian life. By focusing on discipleship churches should find reinvigorated mission and worship. Jesus said to his disciples to make disciples. He gave us the model in the gospels. Discipleship is life on life. It is not program to person. It is person to person. In order to bring about the transformation and renewal of a congregation, discipleship should be the main focus. Everything else, if discipleship is happening, will take place organically. As Mike Breen reminds us, “Effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way around. We need to understand the church as the effect of discipleship and not the cause.”⁴

Relationships are the key to a healthy discipling process. The early church, carried on by the disciples of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, grew and reached the world because they were willing to invite others to come and learn about him. The relationships they built with new converts were started on the foundation that Jesus built with them. This takes time and will not happen overnight. Discipleship that is lasting is a slow process. There are no quick fixes and no short cuts. Jesus was clear, disciple people. That was his plan and that is the plan he gave to the church.

⁴ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011), 92-95, Kindle.

APPENDIX A

Discipleship Survey

Discipleship

Discipleship Survey

This survey is for the purpose of research concerning the thesis project of Rev. Stephen M. Franklin in the doctorate of ministry program at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. All answers are anonymous and will be used to report the outcomes of my doctorate of ministry thesis. Please answer honestly.

1. How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

Never

Sometimes

Regularly

☐

☐

2. Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, please explain why.... (This completes the survey for those who did not participate in the group. Thank you for your participation.)

3. Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, why?

4. Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

Not at All

Somewhat

Very Much

☐

☐

5. After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?

6. If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

☐ I did NOT continue

☐ I did continue

Please explain...

7. Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

Please explain....

8. How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

Not likely Somewhat likely Very likely

☐ ☐

9. How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Not likely Somewhat likely Very likely

☐ ☐

10. Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

APPENDIX B

Survey Results

Discipleship

SurveyMonkey

#1



COMPLETE

Collector: Email Invitation 1 (Email)

Started: Wednesday, November 23, 2016 1:30:04 PM

Last Modified: Wednesday, November 23, 2016 1:34:07 PM

Time Spent: 00:04:03

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

29

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

50

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

No,

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?

Yes. We did not know who we would like to invite to a new group.

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

I did continue

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Somewhat,

Please explain....

It was a good opportunity to discuss the issues in the discipleship materials - and relate to where we were in our faith walk.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

66

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

74

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Respondent skipped this question

#2

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Email Invitation 1 (Email)**Started:** Wednesday, November 23, 2016 3:37:55 PM**Last Modified:** Wednesday, November 23, 2016 4:19:30 PM**Time Spent:** 00:41:35

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

96

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church? Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group? Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

57

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2? No,

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?
Just finished year 1. I would consider leading another group, but more as a small group.

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

Respondent skipped this question

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Somewhat,

Please explain....
I appreciated the weekly accountability of participating in a group. The content/book was time-consuming but did not really offer new knowledge or information to what I previously thought.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

70

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

100

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Respondent skipped this question

#3

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Email Invitation 1 (Email)**Started:** Monday, November 28, 2016 8:28:55 AM**Last Modified:** Monday, November 28, 2016 8:31:35 AM**Time Spent:** 00:02:39

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

50

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

No,

If not, please explain why.... (This completes the survey for those who did not participate in the group. Thank you for your participation.)

Time commitment was an issue. I also believe that the program as structured would eventually collapse under its own weight.

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?*Respondent skipped this question***Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?***Respondent skipped this question***Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?***Respondent skipped this question***Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.***Respondent skipped this question***Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?***Respondent skipped this question***Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?***Respondent skipped this question***Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?***Respondent skipped this question***Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....***Respondent skipped this question*

#4

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Email Invitation 1 (Email)**Started:** Monday, November 28, 2016 8:50:26 PM**Last Modified:** Monday, November 28, 2016 9:05:17 PM**Time Spent:** 00:14:50

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

51

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

96

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

No,

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?

Many people I asked were willing in concept but we were never able to come to an agreeable time to meet. I thought the crack of dawn offered the most flexibility but some had long and rigid commutes. The evenings were always challenging. I was not available 4 evenings per week with other commitments (scouts, choir and working weekends).

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

I did NOT continue

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Yes,

Please explain....

I came to realize that the Holy spirit can really unleash new dimensions to scriptures as a vulnerable discipleship group shares their different perspectives on a passage, theme or challenge question. Expressing the memory verse in your own words and reflecting on the reading reflections are very valuable exercises and come to better light with others sharing their own takes on the passage.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

91

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

89

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Not completing year two is a big disappointment. I am willing to sponsor a group and all the reasons seem like lame excuses but getting to it right away is certain to be an advantage. I look forward to the experience again and the opportunity to be a part of multiplying disciples.

#5

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Email Invitation 1 (Email)**Started:** Tuesday, November 29, 2016 9:31:32 AM**Last Modified:** Tuesday, November 29, 2016 9:39:45 AM**Time Spent:** 00:08:12

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

52

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

80

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

Yes

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

I did continue,

Please explain...

The participants were open and shared freely of their faith and how the scripture affected them. My group may have been a little too large...I think 3-4 would be a good size for a group.

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Yes,

Please explain....

It is always enlightening to hear how others view the scriptures and how the scriptures speak to them. It creates a deeper understanding of just how important and relevant the Bible is to our everyday lives.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

79

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

87

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Respondent skipped this question

#6

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Email Invitation 1 (Email)**Started:** Thursday, December 01, 2016 8:23:32 AM**Last Modified:** Thursday, December 01, 2016 9:08:44 AM**Time Spent:** 00:45:11

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

51

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

98

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

No,

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?

To start with, at least the first dozen people I asked didn't have time. Three came out for the first time, then didn't have time. With some issues of my own, I was less than aggressive myself. I have commitments from four folks that are willing to start soon after January 1, 2017

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

I did NOT continue

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Yes,

Please explain....

As I spent most of my life communicating with other people only a few got inside my space. I found that others aren't prying, but they really care. They also want to be loved and cared for also. I have much a easier time reaching out than in the past.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

99

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

98

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Respondent skipped this question

#7

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Web Link 1 (Web Link)**Started:** Saturday, December 03, 2016 7:38:29 PM**Last Modified:** Saturday, December 03, 2016 7:49:06 PM**Time Spent:** 00:10:37

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

37

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church? Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group? Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

36

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2? Yes

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

I did continue,

Please explain...

Began with 4 in the group. About 1/2 way through on person dropped out due to lack of time. Just being in small group is beneficial however, there was too much repetition. It seemed to be beneficial to individual who is fairly new Christian. The other two not so much.

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Somewhat,

Please explain....

Refreshed some ideas. It was difficult to go through this twice. I guess I am looking more for either a prayer group or very detailed Bible study. Thought about teaching a prayer group. Enjoy Bible commentary. Did help me to be more conscientious about Bible reading and prayer every day.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

47

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

79

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Would recommend this study for a seeker or new Christian or someone wanting to be revitalized.

#8

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Web Link 1 (Web Link)**Started:** Tuesday, December 06, 2016 9:47:48 PM**Last Modified:** Tuesday, December 06, 2016 9:56:20 PM**Time Spent:** 00:08:32

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

95

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

No,

If not, why?
group only met once and was not able to get set up as a group to continue.**Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?**

Respondent skipped this question

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

Respondent skipped this question

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

Respondent skipped this question

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Respondent skipped this question

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

Respondent skipped this question

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

95

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Respondent skipped this question

#9

**COMPLETE****Collector:** Email Invitation 1 (Email)**Started:** Tuesday, December 06, 2016 9:54:37 PM**Last Modified:** Tuesday, December 06, 2016 10:00:05 PM**Time Spent:** 00:05:27

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

94

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group?

Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

53

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

No,

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?
 We had difficulty getting a group together but would consider leading a group in the future.

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

Respondent skipped this question

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Somewhat

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

48

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

92

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

I think that small groups are a great way to learn methods of discipleship and would like to see more. Maybe shorter than one year.

#10

**COMPLETE**

Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)

Started: Tuesday, December 27, 2016 3:03:46 PM

Last Modified: Tuesday, December 27, 2016 3:13:17 PM

Time Spent: 00:09:31

PAGE 1: Discipleship Survey

Q1: How often do you participate in Bible study, Sunday school, or small groups?

1

Q2: Did you participate in a discipleship covenant group through Meridian United Presbyterian Church? Yes

Q3: Did you complete the first year of your discipleship group? Yes

Q4: Did the discipleship group help you grow in your faith?

63

Q5: After completing year 1, did you continue by leading a group of your own in year 2?

No,

If not, why? Would you consider leading a group at any point in the future?
 Limited available time. No, not interested in leading a group.

Q6: If you did continue on to year 2, please explain what went well and what challenges you faced.

I did NOT continue

Q7: Did this model of discipleship challenge how your view discipleship, worship, or mission? Did it have any impact on your faith?

Somewhat,

Please explain....
 The discipleship challenge made me think on how things should be.

Q8: How likely are you to recommend a discipleship group to someone else?

45

Q9: How likely are you to participate in another form of discipleship ministry at Meridian United Presbyterian Church?

67

Q10: Any other comments, questions, or concerns....

Remember to take time to talk about the holidays even if they occur in the midst of a sermon series. Taking a break from the series to preach about the traditional holiday Bible passage is a good thing; and would be welcomed.

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